

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 147 February/March 1999

(unwaged 30p) 50p

POVERTY & INEQUALITY



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Solidarity
Price
£1

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BLAIR'S BRITAIN

Iraq: blood for oil

So, they had their day. On 16 December 1998 President Clinton called Prime Minister Blair from Air Force One and said, 'Get ready for strikes'. There followed the British armed forces 29th military intervention in the Middle East since 1945, with four days of bombardment of Iraq. The Pentagon estimated that US and British forces dropped 88,500 tons of ordnance or, on another estimate, the equivalent of some 350,000 Omagh bombs. The Red Cross estimated 200 civilian deaths. Three hospitals were hit, as well as schools and homes.

Clinton justified the attack on the grounds that the Iraqi government was not complying with the United Nations weapons inspection team. Blair said the purpose was to 'degrade and diminish' Saddam Hussein's military potential and ability to threaten neighbours. UN Permanent Security Council members France, Russia and China all opposed the attack, but they were ignored by the USA, determined to demon-



has grown in strategic importance with the restoration of access for the energy multinationals to the former Soviet Union Caspian Basin reserves. Who controls oil dominates rivals. The USA must assert its dominance over the Middle East if it is not to face contenders for global hegemony and domination. British capitalists seek to benefit as the loyal junior partner in maintaining the regional status quo. Britain has two of the world's top five energy multinationals.

This is why Blair and Clinton will lie, cheat and kill; for oil, profits and power.

Clinton said he ordered the attacks because Iraq would not comply with the UN inspection team. Now his own government officials acknowledge that they planted spies in the team, that the team was used to single out targets for missile attacks and that this was done with the blessing of the team's chair Richard Butler. This is what the Iraqi government claimed all along and the USA denied.

British Defence Secretary



strate its power and willingness to use it unrestrained. Clinton did not bother to inform French President Chirac of the assault, leaving that to Blair.

While *The Sun* encouraged readers to contemplate the prospect of a nuclear attack on Baghdad, more intelligent commentators began to question the logic of the exercise. To suppress doubt and reassure backers, after the raids were launched, Blair announced in Parliament that 30,000 chemical warheads had gone missing in Iraq. British Defence Secretary Robertson told of Iraq's 'anthrax airforce'. With the raids over and the Iraqi state's capacity to maintain resistance and anti-aircraft fire demonstrably intact, US military spokespeople 'revealed' that between 600 and 1,600 key Iraqi Republican Guards were killed. So, presumably it was worth it after all.

This shameful business, which provoked only the most meagre of protests in Britain, angered millions of people around the globe, including protesters in Cape Town who embarrassed Blair. It has the most deadly purpose. The Middle East contains 86.4% of the world's known oil reserves. It

Robertson said of the assault, 'We are there to protect human beings who have been attacked by Saddam'. Repulsive butchers Saddam Hussein's regime may be, but they are matched and far exceeded in the killing business by the US and British governments. This is from a journalist with a conscience, Robert Fisk, *The Independent*, 26 December 1998: 'the result of eight years of UN sanctions: the 5,000 babies dying every month, the children dying of cancer in the irradiated battlefields of southern Iraq, the villagers drinking water from rivers and taps contaminated with sewage, the girls prostituting themselves...'.

'Journalists are afraid of the figure of a million Iraqis dead through sanctions. But if the death toll for children is correct - and the statistic comes from the World Health Organisation - then we are talking about more than 480,000 dead children alone. When do we start talking about genocide?'

The Labour government would not allow a vote on the bombings in the House of Commons. To his credit George Galloway MP sat on the Opposition benches and said, 'You are cowards, you could not face 20 people opposing you.' 20, just 20 MPs, it must be noted.

Meanwhile the US and British raids continue. On 25 January 11 civilians were killed and dozens wounded. No Iraqi defence installation could be found where the missiles landed. The Head of US Central Command offered: 'No one can guarantee that these strikes will not have errors. We deeply regret any civilian casualties.'

In anticipation of the 16 December assault oil prices jumped 16%. Then they fell back. Iraq must be prevented from selling oil if prices and profits are not to fall further. How many barrels of oil is an Iraqi life worth? Not one, seems to be the answer the Labour government would give.

Labour Party

Attacking our democratic rights

Britain is the only major capitalist country where there is no national identity card. A series of policy moves by the Labour government is softening us up for their introduction. The first step is the introduction of ID cards for teenagers. Seven million children between the ages of 12 and 21 are to be targeted by a government-backed private initiative to buy a £5 ID card. The selling point is that it will enable them to show their age if they want to gamble, buy cigarettes or alcohol, or go into a night club. The card will contain their photograph, their name and date of birth, and the phone number of the private register company. The scheme is 'voluntary', but is the proverbial thin end of a wedge. A spokesperson rejected the idea that the card could be used by the police saying 'this is not meant to be a back door way of introducing identity cards'. But it'll do until the necessary legislation proves politically possible.

A second step is the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau. 10 million people will now face criminal vetting each year through the Bureau under the 1997 Police Act as part of applying for a job. It is the responsibility of the individual to get hold of the certificate, which will cost between £5 and £10, and will need to be renewed on an annual basis. The Bureau will be able to keep very close tabs on the 5 million people who have some kind of criminal conviction, information of particular interest for companies who want to filter out political or trade union activists. There will be three levels of certificates: basic, issued to some six million people each year, intermediate, and enhanced. The last will be for people seeking jobs with unsupervised access to children, and will include unproven information such as charges dropped, acquittals and police intelligence on current operations. Since the Bureau will not know who may want to apply for such jobs, its database will hold such data on everybody - a vital national asset for this most oppressive of governments.

So, if there are to be ID cards, how will they be referenced? A national insurance number is no good - not everyone has it. Step forward...the new NHS number (NHN). Government initiatives on 'joined-up thinking' or even 'joined-up action' require

agencies to share information on clients or patients. As we reported in the last issue, with the formation of Youth Offender Teams, this information will be shared with the police as well as between the NHS and local authorities. The most universal and up-to-date numbering scheme is the recently-introduced NNN. It covers nearly everybody, regardless of age, sex or social class. It accesses health records such as GP registration data which will be reasonably up-to-date and accu-



Prime Minister Blair

rate. There are huge development plans to network both the NHS and to connect them to local authorities. Shortly, a national tracing service for the NHS will come on-line. What could be better? With the police now getting in on the act, everything will be in place for the final step - compulsory ID cards for everyone.

Trade unions today and employment rights

We have constantly argued that trade unions are no longer fighting organisations of the working class. A glance at the figures for industrial action over the last four years shows this to be the case. In 1994, a pitiful 278,000 days were lost through official strikes, involving just over 100,000 workers - a mere one in 70 of all trade unionists, or one in 300 of the entire workforce. In 1995, it was little different: 415,000 days lost, 174,000 workers. In 1996, there was a 'blip': 1,303,000 days lost, 364,000 workers involved. By 1997, 235,000 days lost, and in 1998 (to September), 234,000 days lost. In the year to August 1998, there were four strikes over 'trade union' matters involving 900 workers. This is perhaps the most significant sta-

tistic. In the absence of real trade union rights, the only way that workers can establish the right to union representation is through some form of strike action. That there is so little activity of this nature demonstrates how much the official trade union movement has been able to stifle working class activity.

Meanwhile the government has published details of the Employment Relations Bill, trailed in the Fairness at Work White Paper. It gives employees a legal right to be represented by a trade union if half the workforce are members, or if a majority vote for it in a ballot and that majority constitutes more than 40% of the workforce. The legislation does not apply where the workforce is less than 20. A trade union can trigger a ballot only if it has more than 10% membership. An employer can appeal against union representation, even if more than 50% are union members, if it feels that it would impair 'sustainable and good' industrial relations. A trade union cannot engage in industrial action to gain recognition if it is going through a balloting process. The experience in the US where there is similar legislation is that it does not advance union rights whatsoever. Since it requires unions to be open about what is happening, companies are able to identify and pick off key activists. In short, Labour has once more loaded the dice against the working class.

Attacking local councils

In a little-publicised move, Labour are taking steps to cap council spending in a way the Tories never dared to. Councils will be required to keep council tax increases in 1999/00 to a maximum of 4.5%. If they exceed this target, the government will progressively withdraw council tax benefit subsidy. This measure is deliberately targeted at those authorities with the poorest populations, where not only is there greatest demand for services, but where the proportion of people in receipt of council tax benefit is the highest - Liverpool, for instance, where 40% of households are on council tax benefit. If Liverpool council ignored the penalties, it could have to raise council tax by an average £180 to maintain services.

Robert Clough

Lies spread about Rock around the Blockade

Two members of the executive of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign - full-time worker Rob Miller and editor of the CSC's *Cuba Si* newsletter, Steve Wilkinson, have been spreading lies about Rock around the Blockade and the RCG. At the Cuban Embassy's reception to celebrate Republic of Cuba Day in January, Wilkinson told RATB members that: 'Rob Miller is going around saying that one of your members has been kicked out of Cuba.' Earlier in January, in Cayo Largo, Cuba, Wilkinson told a member of Rock around the Blockade he happened to run into that he'd heard that one of our members, 'a trade unionist called Nigel', had been thrown out of Cuba for spying and that it was in the British newspapers in November.

In all this time, neither Miller nor Wilkinson has at any point seen fit to contact Rock around the Blockade, the RCG or the Rainstate Nigel Cook Campaign - we would have been happy to confirm that their gossip was a pack of lies. Nigel Cook has just returned from playing a leading role in a very successful Brigade to Cuba and our relations with the UJC and other organisations in Cuba continue to be positive and fruitful. The question is, to whom else have they been spreading these poisonous lies? We have raised the matter with Rob Miller and look forward to receiving a written apology.

Labour Party

Sticky fingers

CAROL BRICKLEY

The Labour Cabinet, after 18 months in power, is coming apart. This government, which promised an end to the sleaze and corruption that had dogged its Tory predecessors, managed to lose two ministers and a press secretary in a matter of days over Christmas because of 'personal impropriety' – the stink of corruption. 'We came to power promising the highest possible standards in public life,' wrote Peter Mandelson in his resignation letter. 'We have not just to do so, but we must be seen to do so.' Unfortunately, it seems that Mandelson was unconcerned about probity until he was exposed.

Peter Mandelson, Trade and Industry Secretary, resigned on 23 December, when a secret, low-interest loan of £373,000 from fellow Minister (Paymaster General) Geoffrey Robinson was exposed in the press. The Department of Trade and Industry is currently engaged in two investigations which involve Robinson – one into Robinson's own affairs, another into the labyrinthine business practices of the late Robert Maxwell, Robinson's former business partner. No connection of course. The loan was made in 1986 when Peter Mandelson was a poor-but-aspiring back

bencher earning only £40,000 (!) a year. It is a well-known trait of multi-millionaires (Robinson is one) that they routinely bankroll the poor. The sad mistake, we are told, was that Mandelson failed to tell anyone – even his best mate the Prime Minister, or indeed the civil servants involved in the investigations.

The loan was used to top up a mortgage on Mandelson's £475,000 four-storey house in fashionable Notting Hill (worth 36 houses in his constituency, Hartlepool). Quite how a 'low-paid' back-bencher, or even a better-paid Minister, could afford to pay back such a loan, even at low interest, on top of a mortgage, spend £50,000 on a 'minimalist' (read 'very costly') interior designer, purchase chairs costing £1,500 each and run another house in his constituency, is anyone's guess. Mandelson, it is certain, was determined to live a fashionable high life. He told an audience of Silicon Valley executives in October that Labour is 'intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich'. Especially if they are government ministers, perhaps. Mandelson will now sell his house for £800,000 plus, pay back the loan and pocket the profit. After a short spell of relaxation, he will slither back into a position of power – Foreign Secretary perhaps, to replace the damaged Robin Cook.

Mandelson's demise forced



Mandelson 'chez lui', feeling relaxed about getting filthy rich

Geoffrey Robinson, his banker, to throw in the towel as well. Robinson has been dogged by failures to disclose his business interests to the register of MPs' interests. He managed to overlook several directorships, and embarrassed the government by benefiting from an offshore (tax-free) trust. Robinson was valued in government for his enterprise and business expertise – he was an arch proponent of Public Finance Initiatives, designed to asset-strip the NHS. The current DTI investigation covers 13 possible breaches of company law. The exposure of Mandelson's loan forced his resignation.

Behind the resignations there is a subtext of personal backbiting within the Cabinet between the Blairite camp and the supporters of Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Charlie Whelan, Gordon Brown's Press Secretary at the Treasury, was suspected of leaking the Mandelson loan in a bout of revenge because Mandelson had ditched Brown in favour of Blair in the battle for Labour Party leadership after the death of John Smith. Robinson, a Brownite who reputedly bankrolled the future Chancellor's office to the tune of £200,000 before the election, had to go as a quid pro quo for Mandelson. In the subsequent bloodletting, Whelan also had to resign.

This is the character of New Labour. It is a government characterised by greed, vanity and personal squabbling. Their sickness had already been exposed when Mandelson's lobbyist friends, Derek Draper and Roger Liddle, were forced out for charging businesses for

influencing the government. It is not policy that divides them, but the feeding frenzy over money and power. None of this surprises us – on the contrary it is exactly as FRPI predicted. True to form, Labour is promoting the interests of capitalism, and it expects a cut.

The Labour government has nothing to do with us, the working class. Its relationship to the workers and to the poor is that of a nineteenth-century capitalist who fancies himself charitable while calculating his profits; a slave owner who is polite to the slaves, but does nothing to oppose slavery. And alongside their vile greed, Labour preaches and patronises us, promoting frugality and continence. Stuff them.

The last Straw

According to Home Secretary Jack Straw, more teenage mothers should give up their children. Social workers, appar-



ently, underestimate the financial and emotional difficulties of parenthood, and therefore fail to recommend the obvious solution for lone parents, adoption. The fall in the number of adoptions since 1988 – 25,000 a year when many women were coerced into giving up their children, down to 6,000 a year today, is a question of fashion. It is much better, he said, for young, working-class mothers to give up their children voluntarily, than 'if the children are later taken into care'.

Such a transformation of 'fashion' in childcare would no doubt solve a few problems for Mr Jack Straw. Gone would be any need to make sure that lone parents have the financial and emotional support necessary to keep their children. If the best solution – keeping their children – is too expensive, then why not kill two birds with one stone: save money on the benefits and care system, and satisfy the needs of the childless middle classes who will raise the children to a better standard anyway!

Good thinking, Jack. Disregard the wealth of evidence that adoption means heartbreak for mothers whose lives are blighted by losing their children. Disregard the effect this can have on the children. Instead, help all those would-be parents who at the moment have to raid Third World countries for suitable adoptees – increase the supply on the home market. Wonderful. What next...Transportation?

Education notes

SUSAN DAVIDSON

'These children are impoverished in every way.'
Headteacher, January 1989

At a time when Blair bleats on about how middle class Britain has become all the evidence points to the reverse. Poverty directly affects children, and black children disproportionately. The multiple problems of bad housing, unemployment, inadequately resourced schools, poor health and institutional racism are compressed into a sad and bitter climate of deprivation. In some areas black children are up to 15 times more likely to be excluded from school than their white classmates. In others truancy rates continue to rise however much schools try to disguise them.

When the Thatcher/Baker Education Act was introduced in 1988 the Minister of Education predicted that 'failing schools will wither on the vine'. They knew that the introduction of competition between schools would result in the rapid polarisation of middle class and working class schools, with resources going to 'successful' schools while schools for poor children would suffer from rising class sizes, fewer permanent teachers, a greater density of pupils with 'special needs' and public humiliation from published exam results.

Where the Tories were wrong was that poor children's schools have not disappeared. They continue to exist because the children they provide for con-

tinue to exist, indeed the number of poor children has grown to the point where 4.6 million children are living in poverty today. New Labour is thrashing around with threats to teachers, parents and pupils in an effort to regulate the increasing pool of poverty and alienation to be found in British schools. The recent spate of announcements and measures on schooling from post-Mandelson New Labour blames the teachers, the parents and the pupils for the mess of education.

Home PCs: the haves and the have-nots

School League Tables of exam results at GCSE are equivalent to League Tables of personal computers in the home, a recent survey has reported. Added to all the other disadvantages suffered by poor students is the absence of a PC at home for wordprocessing, spreadsheet software and use of the Internet. Confidence and familiarity with information technology, as well as the demand to produce almost professionally presented work is an increasing requirement for school work. One half of the top 20% earning households have a PC, compared to a fifth in the bottom 20%. Overall 80% of children with PCs use them for homework. Although this may not seem serious to an older generation, the researchers know that children from poor backgrounds are being 'seriously disadvantaged' in yet another of their 'life chances'.

'The recent spate of announcements and measures on schooling from New Labour blames the teachers, the parents and the pupils for the mess of education.'



Market that school!

It is rumoured that Blunkett and Blair are not as one on the issue of whether schools should be sold to profit-making businesses or merely to 'not-for-profit' organisations and consortia. On this issue, 'it is Mr. Blair who is by far the more radical thinker', according to *The Guardian*. 'Radical' here means no principles except to provide his cronies in private business with

a nice little earner. The London Borough of Hackney may well provide the next pickings for privatisation if it fails its Ofsted inspection. This might prove a slight embarrassment to the Department for Education because Hackney schools have effectively been run by the government-appointed hit-squad for the past 18 months. New Labour, however, is not for shaming. Downing Street itself

is taking an active interest in selling off schools. Mr Blair wants to see it done and adverts are appearing as we go to press. Phone 0171 802 2330 to buy in to an Education Action Zone. We quote: 'Successful applicants will receive up to £1 million a year'.

The reality, of course, is that working class schools can never make a real profit but merely transfer money from the state to the private sector. Blair is too stupid or too ideologically hostile to local education authorities to see this. But then Blair, despite being leader of the Labour Party does send his sons to the London Oratory, a school that is not only selective and opted-out of the local authority but where the head and governors refuse to recognise any of the teaching unions.

Home and away with your foot in your mouth

As Minister of Education, David Blunkett is particularly revolting for dismissing over a hundred years of socialist thought in one sentence when he said 'poverty is no excuse' for children failing at school. But at least this pompous idiot is no spin-doctor. He managed to attack parents for taking children away from school on holiday at the very moment when the Blair family was frolicking

in the Seychelles during term time! 'One rule for us and another for you lot' is the usual ruling class attitude, but usually they are a bit discreet about it. But these nouveau Labour riches just can't shut up and stop lecturing the rest of us about how to behave.

Latest news: SATS National Curriculum tests unreliable

Chris Woodhead (Woodentop to teachers), big-headed head of Ofsted, is also a great one for foot-in-mouth disease. He only casually dismissed the National Curriculum SATS Tests as 'worthless' over the Christmas holidays! This may not seem particularly exciting but there is a long, expensive and anguished history to these tests. They have a lot riding on them. The government has linked its education policy (so-called) to these tests. Target-setting for each school in each subject is based on these tests and they are used to measure progress. Inspectors use the results, league tables are published, pupils go through agony, teachers stop teaching and prepare for the tests, payment by results will be based on them and this Woodhead just rubbishes them! It is best to be suspicious – something is going on, or is there just another ego competition among the education bosses?

Stephen Lawrence case: racist police evade justice

CAT WIENER

The preliminary draft of the report by the Stephen Lawrence public inquiry is expected to contain scathing criticism of 24 Metropolitan police officers for 'appalling' failures in their professional duty. Yet all but one of the racist senior officers in the case have escaped justice through retirement.

Only public outcry prevented Detective Chief Inspector Ben Bullock slipping away into comfortable immunity on a full pension – just before, coincidentally, the Police Complaints Authority announced they would press seven charges of neglect of duty against him. Faced with furious accusations of a cover-up by the Lawrence family, campaigners and the media, the PCA has been forced to concede that the tribunal will go ahead as planned, despite Bullock's retirement in April.

However, his colleagues, senior detectives responsible for the bungled police investigation into Stephen's murder, remain untouchable. It is by now known that it was police failure to act on information and tip-offs, their refusal to make immediate arrests of suspects and their racist indifference to the murder of a young black man, that ensured vital evidence which could have brought Stephen's murderers to justice was never collected.

Detective Chief Superintendent William Isley had overall control of the investigation. No arrests were made for a full two weeks after the murder – he indifferently crumpled up the list of suspects presented to



Commemoration for Stephen Lawrence

him by Mrs Lawrence. Retired from police force in 1995 to join a security company.

Detective Superintendent Ian Crampton authorised a surveillance operation of suspects, later described as a 'crass failure', and refused to make any arrests in the first three days after the murder, despite numerous tip-offs. Retired in 1996.

Detective Superintendent Brian Weeden, in charge of the murder investigation for 14 months, initially continued to delay arrests: he later told the public inquiry he did not realise he could make arrests based on 'reasonable suspicion'. Retired in 1994.

Detective Inspector Ben Bullock headed a 'dispirited and negative' team and was described as lacking even 'one innovative or positive strategy'. When a crucial witness came to give a statement at the police station the day after Stephen's murder, Bullock didn't even bother to see him.

Detective Chief Superintendent Roderick Barker's white-wash review of the police investigation in 1994, after the CPS decided not to prosecute the

five suspects, was later described by the public inquiry as 'indefensible'. It claimed that the investigation had 'progressed satisfactorily and that all lines of inquiry had been correctly pursued', in order not to damage police morale!

It is outrageous that, in the face of this shameful litany of police failure, the draft report should also now criticise the Lawrence family and their legal team for taking out a private prosecution when the CPS decided they did not have enough evidence to prosecute the murderers, Neil and Jamie Acourt, David Norris, Gary Dobson and Luke Knight. To have faith that the police would miraculously come up with evidence at that late stage, when they had deliberately fudged the investigation in the crucial early stages, is ridiculous. The privately-brought prosecution against three of the men was dismissed when evidence from Duwayne Brooks, Stephen's friend who was with him at the time of the murder, was ruled unreliable. This was a man who, traumatised by his experience, was offered an sup-

port or sympathy by the police who first arrived on the scene but was instead interrogated as a suspect, whom police later tried to accuse of stealing a soft drink to discredit his evidence, and who was guarded during the private prosecution by a police officer with criminal links with one of the accused! In an interview, he admitted he was still frightened for his life. The news that the current head of the murder investigation, Detective Inspector Albert Patrick, is caught up in a corruption inquiry will have done little to restore the Lawrences' faith in the police.

What is certain is that, without the courageous battle by the Lawrence family and their legal team to pursue every avenue open to them, the truth about Stephen's racist murder and police complicity with it would never have been told. It is entirely due to their efforts to publicly expose police racism, for example, that the death of Michael Menson, a black musician burned to death two years ago, is finally being treated seriously as a racist attack and not, grotesquely, as suicide. Amnesty has been offered to witnesses who may have been involved in minor illegal activity on the night of his death in January 1997 and an appeal for information was televised on *Crimestwatch*. All this is intended to give credibility to the newly-formed police Racial and Violent Crime Squad; the police hope it will go some way towards rebuilding their shattered reputation in the eyes of the black community. However, it all comes far too late for the Lawrences, who in their continuing fight to see justice for Stephen have announced they are to sue the Metropolitan police. ■



Labour council closes old people's home

NIGEL COOK

When the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign protested outside Blackburn Labour Party's Christmas bash, we attracted lots of attention in the local press. The demonstration was organised to highlight Labour's support for the 'New Deal' forced labour scheme and the increasing use of casual workers who are paid poverty wages.

In a full-page article titled 'Labour anger at low wage demo', Phil Riley, secretary of Blackburn Labour Party, could not refute our claims and instead attempted to attack the campaign. He said 'Guests at the party included a number of pensioners, who were subjected to a barracking as they went in'. This lie was not only aimed at damaging the campaign but was also designed to draw attention away from the plans Blackburn Labour-controlled council has in store for the residents of its old people's care homes.

In mid-November the council announced that it was going to save £1 million by closing down some of its care homes. Labour councillor Sue Reid, chair of the Social Services committee responsible for the cuts, said that residents would be given the option of going into privately-run homes or moving out of care altogether! The facts that many of the residents are in their 80s and 90s, and that some of them have been in the homes for over 20 years, seemed to have escaped her.

Relatives of the residents at one of the homes, Shadsworth House, set up a campaign to stop the closures. They organised a public meeting and invited all the councillors on the Social Services committee

to hear their views. With the exception of one Liberal councillor, none came. The three Shadsworth ward councillors, all Labour, didn't even bother to show up.

Malcolm Doherty, a former full-time officer for UNISON and now the council leader, also refused to attend the relatives' public meeting. Earlier in the year Doherty had boasted in a council meeting: 'Watch my lips, no homes for the elderly will be closed'.

The council assured residents and relatives that no final decision on the homes would be taken until mid-February. Again, this meant nothing in reality: Shadsworth House now stands empty, the last resident having been moved out on 15 January, and only two residents remain in Laneside Nursing Home as we go to press. Some of the residents have been shipped out against the advice of their doctors. Since the moving of residents started, nine have died. Temporary care staff have been laid off and full-time members have been threatened with the sack if they talk to the press.

In the financial year 1997/98 councillors claimed three times more in expenses than the previous year, over £350,000 compared to £100,200. Malcolm Doherty paid himself £16,208 – £10,000 more than he claimed the previous year. Sue Reid got £7,828. The three Shadsworth ward councillors claimed as follows: £6,827 Jim Blackburn, £5,367 Mike Madigan and £3,971 Tony Humphreys. The council also bought a new mayoral limo. All councillors can have a computer with internet and e-mail facilities, plus laptops and mobile phones. The numbers for the mobile phones are not given to members of the public. ■

Roger Sylvester – murdered by Tottenham police

Neighbours of Roger Sylvester's in Tottenham, north London, remember him as a generally quiet young man, known to have mental health problems, for which he had been receiving treatment at the local St Ann's Hospital. On the night of 11 January 1999 Roger ran naked and shouting into the street. The police arrived on the scene, handcuffed him and carted him off to St Ann's with such force that he had to immediately be moved again to the Whittington hospital, where he was put on a life-support machine. A week later he died.

On 24 January Roger Sylvester's family, friends and neighbours gathered outside what had been his flat and laid flowers before marching around the block and up Tottenham High Road. As they walked they were joined by more people, mainly local but some from campaigning groups. Neville Lawrence, Stephen's father, spoke.

The police presence was huge and even after the vigil

and march were over, there was still a roadblock at a nearby junction, dozens of vans parked up in side-streets, cops on bikes and a helicopter overhead. Plainclothes police mingled with the departing protesters, hoping to pick up hints of impending trouble. The atmosphere was massively tense but, largely out of respect for the wishes of Roger's family, who had pleaded for calm, there was no riot.

The West Green area of Tottenham has prospered in the years since the Broadwater Farm uprising. It is generally considered a fairly safe and pleasant place to live. But the murder of Roger Sylvester exposed just how little improvement there has really been in relations between the black community and the police. Anger is mounting and the feeling on the streets is that it's a long time since the police had the sort of 'good hiding' they got in 1985. The lid will not stay on forever.

Nicki Jameson

Police cause death in Lincoln – a familiar story

JIM CRAVEN

In September last year, on St Giles Estate – a working-class area of Lincoln – local care-worker Rosemary Fyfe was killed outside her home. According to eyewitnesses she was hit on the head with a piece of wood by a police-

woman. 'It was a good whack. I saw it. She is [sic] a big woman and she went down – she just slumped to the floor', said one witness.

Another neighbour said 'The police turned up with CS gas looking for action. They waded in and picked the first kid they laid their hands on. They grabbed hold of a lad who was sat on the wall, holding a piece of wood which he was tapping against the wall.'

'They grabbed him and were really heavy-handed. I told them to calm down but they took no notice. Then Minnie [Mrs Fyfe] came out and told the police to go easy.

Minnie was telling them to

calm down and the female copper dropped the piece of wood, picked it up again and lunged over the garden fence and hit her on the forehead with some force. She fell back and landed on a shopping trolley in her garden. The kids, including her own, saw everything.'

The policewoman was put on sick leave. The incident was investigated by another police force. After four months of investigations, which included at least 30 statements from eyewitnesses, the police have still not made an arrest nor even said how they think Mrs Fyfe was killed.

Things would have been very different if Mrs Fyfe had lived in a middle-class district. But such events are a familiar story on working-class estates, among black and Asian communities and in the nationalist working-class areas of Ireland. The police, as agents of the capitalist state, keep the working class in their place. ■



Tameside careworkers win Tribunal decision

The Tameside careworkers' case for unfair dismissal went to a preliminary industrial tribunal hearing on 14 December. After listening to details of the case, the hearing agreed that the careworkers could take their case to a full industrial tribunal hearing some time in the new year. For UNISON this is the culmination of their 'campaign', a victory! For the sacked careworkers, the most they can expect from a successful tribunal is some compensation. Their jobs have been lost.

Pinochet: Law Lords decide again

ROBERT CLOUGH

As we go to press, the Spanish government is, for the second time, appealing against the High Court's decision not to extradite General Pinochet to Spain to face charges of murder, torture and kidnapping. This follows an unprecedented decision by the Law Lords to set aside their majority ruling of last November that Pinochet did not have immunity against extradition proceedings.

As our last issue went to press, the first panel of Law Lords had ruled in Spain's favour by a 3:2 majority and Pinochet's fate lay in Home Secretary Jack Straw's hands. We argued that whilst Straw might want to return Pinochet to Chile, he could not: 'it would render his political position untenable - tough on anti-social behaviour, tough on child criminals, tough on asylum seekers, soft on mass murderers' (FRPI December 1998/January 1999).

There were many considerations for Straw to weigh up. First, there was the cash side. British exports to Chile - £211m per annum. Exports to Spain -

£6,353m per annum. That was an easy one to solve. More serious was the pressure from US imperialism, which had actively supported the coup that brought Pinochet to power in 1973. Secretary of State Madeline Albright pushed hard for the government to accept Chilean demands that he be returned to face trial in his own country. Everyone knew this would not happen: Pinochet has immunity as a senator for life, and even if the Chilean government abolished this, the general would be tried in a military court which would inevitably acquit him. It appeared to be a political choice between Europe and the US - Straw would have to snub one or the other.

In the end, his main consideration was how to keep himself in office. Hence, in a statement issued on 9 December, he said that Pinochet was fit to stand trial, that the charges Pinochet faced in Spain were equivalent to UK offences, and that there were no grounds for him to intervene to stop the extradition process from restarting. William Hague condemned the decision as 'cowardly', whilst Pino-

chet's close friend Baroness Thatcher said that 'Jack Straw had ample power to put an end to this shameful and damaging episode. This was a political decision and it represents a failure of political leadership'.

As soon as the Law Lords had made their decision, the issue of Lord Hoffman, one of the 3:2 majority, who is a director of Amnesty International Charity Limited, was raised by Pinochet's lawyers, arguing that bias or the appearance of bias should nullify the decision.

A panel of five different Law Lords agreed, less than a month later, that Hoffman's involvement gave rise to a suspicion of bias, even though Hoffman had not been involved in any of Amnesty International's campaigning activities. Hoffman had made no secret of this link - it was a well-known fact within the legal establishment.

Underlying this U-turn is a significant division of opinion in the ruling class, with one section unwilling to give Pinochet up to Spain without a fight. Hoffman was pilloried for not standing down from the original panel. Lord Irvine, Labour Attorney General wrote to Lord

Browne-Wilkinson urging him to ensure that the membership of any new panel be vetted 'in



order to ensure the impartiality, and the appearance of impartiality.' Browne-Wilkinson came up trumps: it appeared that the seven Law Lords (out of a total of 12) who were not on the first panel were not only free of bias, but also free of the appearance of bias. This is perhaps not surprising: four of

them went to Oxford, and three to Cambridge, and all of them are elderly, white, male and rich. Their decision is expected soon.

Meanwhile, sections of the ruling class continue to rally round Pinochet. The Tory Party has lined up behind him, as has virtually all the press. The Monday Club, on the Tory right wing, has published a pamphlet arguing that there is 'absolutely

Chilean people, and the methods he used were torture and murder. The idea he did not know what was going on is of course laughable - tapes made of his radio conversations during the coup reveal him as demanding the death of president Allende.

The Tories are not alone. The Chilean representatives who came to Britain to plead with Straw to release Pinochet were all members of the Socialist Party who had sold their principles for the fleshpots of government. They had their supporters in the British 'left' as well: Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, wrote that what mattered after the Law Lords decision was 'what would be best for a still endangered democracy in Chile', continuing 'the regretful but considered view among leaders of the Chilean left, including survivors who were in office in 1970-73, is that the return of an inevitably discredited and humiliated Pinochet would do the least harm to the chances of democratic progress in their country.'

In fact, 'democratic progress' in Chile depends entirely on the whim of the military. They dictate politics in Chile, they are the real power even if they allow Hobsbawm's friends to play at parliamentarianism. The only people in Chile who want Pinochet back are the rich and their political puppets. Everyone else just wants him to face justice, and if that has to be in Spain, then so be it. ■

Ireland: Loyalist terror attacks continue

BOB SHEPHERD

The attempts of Mo Mowlam, assisted by William Hague, to whip up a storm in the British media over so-called 'punishment beatings' (despite the British government's own figures showing such incidents to be at their lowest levels for the past two years) is simply a smokescreen to hide the real intimidation taking place in the Six Counties.

Portadown was the focal point for Loyalists over the Christmas and New Year period. The Orange Order staged rallies and marches to challenge the ban on it marching down the Garvaghy Road. Local solicitor Rosemary Nelson received a threatening phonecall from the mid-Ulster UVF, warning that an Orange march in Portadown the Saturday before Christmas would 'get serious'. The Orange Order had hoped for a turnout of 50,000, but fewer than 5,000 turned out to march to the barricades at Drumcree church, demanding to be allowed down the Garvaghy Road.

On New Year's Day, a similar number of Loyalists marched through Portadown accompanied by 18 bands, a large number openly supporting the UVF. This intimidation of the nationalist community continued on the evening of 12 January, when more than 200 Loyalists attempted to force their way onto the Garvaghy Road, attacking local residents, damaging cars and property. The RUC having conveniently disappeared, it was the mobilisation of the local community which kept the Loyalists out.

Alongside the intimidation by the Orange marches has been the rising number of armed sectarian attacks on the nationalist community. A new Loyalist fascist group has emerged calling itself the 'Orange Volunteer Force'. Its first public act was to place an advert in the official programme of the Belfast Orange Order on 12 July last year, where it declared: 'The Orange Volunteers will work and fight without tie or bond with the help of Almighty God to maintain Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom.'

On 16 December, the OVF bombed a bar near Crumlin and carried out a gun and grenade attack on the home of a nationalist family in Castledawson, south Derry. Luckily in both incidents nobody was injured. On 28 December, the OVF attacked the home of the O'Connor family in Armagh city. A blast bomb was detonated outside the living room window, but double glazing protected the family from the full force of the blast.

In Belfast during the same week a nationalist on his way to work at 6.30am was confronted by a gunman as he walked along Henry Street; fortunately the gun jammed as the man attempted to fire.

On 6 January a building worker was slightly injured by a bomb planted outside the Magherafelt Gaelic Athletic Association club. The OVF claimed the attack, releasing a statement which clearly shows the random sectarian nature of their actions. They said: 'The wider nationalist community



RUC protects Orangemen on Garvaghy Road - local community protests

now have everything to fear, now the siege of Ulster continues.'

On 19 January, the OVF bombed the house of a nationalist in Loughinisland, Co Down, injuring a man. On 25 January, they attempted to blow up the car of a Catholic family living in a predominantly Loyalist housing estate in Co Armagh.

This escalation of attacks on the nationalist community takes place as the 'peace process' stagnates. Trimble and the Ulster Unionists still refuse to sit with Sinn Féin in an executive of ministers until the IRA begins to hand over its weapons, a stand which has no

basis in the Agreement. Decommissioning is a separate process and does not have to be completed until May 2000. The impasse cannot continue indefinitely. The response of Sinn Féin has been to urge the British and Irish governments to put pressure on the Unionists. The editorial in *An Phoblacht* on 14 January appealed to Tony Blair, saying he 'has a responsibility to move things forward.' As communists in Britain, we see Tony Blair, the Labour government and British imperialism as the problem. Without Britain, Trimble, the Ulster Unionists and the OVF would cease to exist. ■

Palestine: women and children murdered for imperialism

PAUL GREEN

At the beginning of December, 2,000 Palestinian prisoners were on hunger strike in protest at the Israeli refusal to release untried prisoners as part of the peace agreement.

Once again, the US-backed Zionists fail to deliver on their part of the bargain with Arafat, even though Arafat is doing his best with his Palestinian 'police force' to suppress a dispossessed people.

As the eleventh anniversary of the Intifada approached on 9 December, rioting broke out in the predominantly Arab city of Nablus. The Palestinian-controlled authorities injured 14 stone-throwing youths with live and plastic bullets. Behind the police line, Israeli regular soldiers stood ready to 'defend' the ten per cent of homes occupied by Jewish settlers.

The following day mass rioting broke out across the entire West Bank and Gaza. This time Arafat's police, on Israeli instructions, were confined to barracks as the Israeli troops swung into action. Heavy-handed plainclothes soldiers infiltrated the rioters to snatch ringleaders, whilst the army responded with tear gas, plastic bullets and live ammunition, injuring many people and killing a 15-year-old Palestinian.

On the next day (11 December) Arafat announced that the clause in the Palestinian constitution that calls for the 'destruction of the state of

Israel' is to be dropped. The fact that \$300m from the United States might be at risk prompted this gesture of cosiness between Arafat and the Zionist leader Netanyahu.

As part of the US sponsorship of Israel it was announced that the USA had sent Patriot missiles to Israel. Patriots are anti-missile missiles, adopted by the British navy after the Malvinas war to counter Argentinian Exocets and were also used in the Gulf War. Is it any coincidence that these arrived just before the latest bombing raids on Iraq?

As rioting continued the following day in the West Bank town of Qalquiliya, the Palestinian people showed what they thought of Arafat's statement and his received bribe. This time the Israeli army seriously injured 50 people and killed two teenagers.

Not content with butchery on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Netanyahu, with the world's press corps in tow, visited the town of Kiryat Shmona, close to the Lebanese border, where 13 Israelis had been injured in a Hizbollah attack. He was reported as saying 'We cannot go through this silently and we will respond.' What he failed to mention was that this was not an unprovoked attack. The previous morning an Israeli jet had made a bombing run into southern Lebanon intending to knock out a Hizbollah base. The raid killed a mother and six of her seven young children. No 'terrorists' were killed.

Fortress Europe and the Trojan Horse

'Britain is forging a new relationship with Europe... I have no doubt at all that is where the future interests of my country lie.' Thus spake Tony Blair having announced the 'historic' St Malo Declaration on 4 December with French President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin. This was a declaration of intent to build a unified European military force. It came just weeks before the 1 January 1999 launch of the European single currency, the euro. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

Money and armed force are central components in the construction of a European state. Blair was saying that Britain was not going to be left out of this process. Then, on 19 January, British Aerospace announced it was buying GEC's Marconi division in preference to partnership with French and German weapons producers. The cry 'Perfidious Albion' went up in continental boardrooms. Blair was said to be 'fuming'.

Steps towards consolidating the European power bloc make the Labour government's attempt to straddle its two positions - being the USA's number one partner while moving closer to the European project - more precarious. Tensions increase with the global capitalist crisis, intensified rivalry for markets and profits and the looming prospect of trade war between the USA and Europe.

Fanfare for the euro

Since 1 January non-cash transactions between 11 European Union (EU) member states have been conducted in euros. Euro notes and coins will be introduced in 2002 as the 11 national currencies are phased out. Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Greece are the EU countries not participating. Nevertheless, writing in the *Wall Street Journal* of 4 January 1999, Blair wished the new money well. Under the headline 'An opportunity, not a threat', Blair said: 'London will be at the centre of the euro even though Britain is not part of the first wave to join Europe's single currency... If the euro works and the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous, we would recommend entry.' Blair went on to praise the removal of exchange costs for member countries, exchange rate stability, price transparency, pan-European corporate mergers, financial market link ups and similar blessings.

It was left to the French Prime Minister to spell out the political reality: the euro will allow Europe 'to escape the domination of the dollar' and the USA, which ineptly seeks to be 'organiser of the international community'.

As we stated in FRFI 140 (December 1997/January 1998), the Labour government was elected because Thatcherite contempt for Germany and Europe was no longer sustainable. The British ruling class recognises that the only possibility for maintaining social stability, founded on the middle class and more affluent workers, is in alliance with Germany and Europe.

Preparing Britain to sign up to join the euro-zone, the British government has set up committees to draft a National Changeover Plan. Priorities are the timescale for joining and the rate at which the pound joins the euro. Several bigger British companies are already forcing smaller suppliers to invoice in euros.

While it is common among the British ruling class for Britain's closer involvement with Europe to be seen as indicative of Britain's relative decline, in Europe the progress of the

EU is viewed as their success, their post-war reassertion. The establishment of the euro is a potential challenge to the supremacy of the dollar and the USA.

The combined population of the 11 euro-zone members is 292 million, compared with the USA's 268 million; the gross domestic product (GDP) is \$6.26 trillion, compared to the USA's \$8.11 trillion; and euro-zone exports are 18.8% of the world total compared to the USA's 14.1%.

Where European exports predominate, the challenge to the dollar's role as leading world reserve currency is strong. Tunisia and Egypt swiftly followed the euro's launch by converting dollar holdings into the new currency. Taiwan's central bank now keeps a third of its reserves in euros. Poland redefined its zloty weighting against other currencies with the euro benefiting at the expense of sterling. Brazil's January devaluation of the real saw a currency flight to the euro. European oil imports from the Middle East exceed those of the USA. There is a likelihood that Middle Eastern oil producers will price oil in euros rather than dollars. The US Treasury makes at least \$16 billion a year from foreigners holding dollars. It is not just this money that is threatened.

The US current account (trade) deficit is expected to reach close to \$300 billion this year, 4% of gross domestic product. It needs funding and has been funded for 20 years by foreigners investing in the USA and buying dollar assets. Now a deficit on investment income has appeared. The USA is borrowing to pay interest on its borrowings. Japan, which has been the biggest funder of the US current account deficit and which bought \$54 billion of US securities in 1996, became a net seller on the US stock market in 1998 with a \$3 billion withdrawal.

Two consequences follow: first, the US government may push up interest rates to stem the flow of liquidity out of the country, triggering the New Great Crash on Wall Street; second, there will be a drive to protectionism and trade war to reverse the growing trade deficit. The consequences for Wall Street are the same: meltdown. (See FRFI 127 October/November 1995).

At the moment the US government threatens to impose \$520 million a year sanctions on EU exports because of a dispute over European trade preferences for Caribbean bananas, but the wider crisis of trade deficits with Japan and Europe drive the dispute.

Discordant notes

The euro fanfare cannot hide discordant notes in Europe itself. Euro-zone unemployment is officially 10.8% and rising. Membership of the zone removes national governments' control over interest and exchange rates to influence their economies. Overall economic growth is forecast to be just 1.4% this year - low. Ireland's economy grew 5.5% in 1998, while Italy's managed 1.5%, yet they have the same base interest rate set by the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. By usual capitalist poli-



cies Ireland's rate would be higher and Italy's lower. Problems of uneven development, with regional patchworks of boom and slump, will be exacerbated.

Such unevenness requires transfers of funds within the European Union to counteract regional depression, but the budget is to be capped at current levels and a 1998 Growth and Stability Pact enforced, restricting governments' abilities to borrow and spend. Public spending, pensions and social security are targeted for attack; the price of a strong euro.

Europe does not yet have a cohesive capitalist class. There are disputes over budget contributions, enlargement of the EU to the east, economic policy priorities and foreign policy. These reflect different capitalist histories and interests. Germany accounts for 36% of the euro-zone GDP. It is bound to throw its weight about. Germany's £8 billion net contribution is 60% of the EU budget and 17 times Britain's contribution. Germany wants Britain's £2 billion rebate brought down and its own contribution cut. Britain's Labour government will be singled out to show their European credentials where it hurts most. National rivalry within Europe has far from ended.

When Blair says that Labour will recommend Britain joining the euro if it proves a success and is appropriate, what he means is that the City has an awful lot to lose from exclusion and the City will fight to ensure its position as the financial centre of Europe. It cannot stand outside without having its ability to subordinate potential rivals undermined. (See FRFI 141 February/March 1998).

The City has 32% of the world's currency trade, \$640 billion daily; Frankfurt has 5% and Paris 4%. The City has half the world's trade in non-local shares; it ranks second only to Tokyo as a fund management centre; its Liffe derivatives market is the biggest in the world; it is the centre of the world insurance and shipbroking

business. The City contributes about a quarter of the British economy's earnings. There is a lot to lose and a lot to gain, and capitalists, be they German, French or whatever, have unconscionable appetites.

The advent of the euro forces 11 stock markets to price in euros. Together they are worth twice the City Stock Exchange. They are integrating and competing for funds with the City. The euro-denominated bond market will be far bigger than the British market and worth initially 60% of the US market. Already the Liffe has seen money market business move to Frankfurt.

Fortress Europe and the Trojan horse

The St Malo Declaration states, 'the union (EU) must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.' Dependence on US forces in former Yugoslavia and their role in the Gulf demonstrate the relative incapacity of the European bloc to assert its interests abroad by force.

In British Aerospace and GEC/Marconi, Britain had Europe's two biggest arms producers. Combined EU defence expenditure is 60% of that of the USA. However, Europe has 10 main contractors for military aircraft and helicopters, the USA has 5; Europe has 4 contractors for tanks, the USA has 1; Europe has 12 contractors for missiles, the USA has 3. The costs of weapons research and production force a concentration of the European arms industry and the British firms would naturally be at the centre of it. The alternative is dependence on the USA.

The British ruling class must draw closer to the European project for economic, social and political reasons. However its multinationals, with overseas investments exceeded only by those of the USA, and the global role of the City, make it dependent on linking up with US military

force to protect its global interests - witness the Gulf. For the USA, Britain can play the role of Trojan Horse, providing an entrance into and undermining attempts to build an independent European bloc: a Fortress Europe. The dance of the defence consolidation game reflects these counter-points.

While British Aerospace conducted negotiations to merge with Germany's DaimlerChrysler Aerospace (DASA) to form the core of a European Aerospace and Defence Company, which the French and others would later join, GEC/Marconi encouraged suitors from the USA, Lockheed Martin and Northrop, with some enticement to the French Thomson thrown in for good measure to boost the selling price. Lockheed has partnership agreements with 75 British companies and is a major supplier to the RAF. GEC/Marconi was the sixth biggest defence contractor to the USA, having purchased a Texas firm Tracor. The US state favours such trans-Atlantic deals.

British Aerospace and DASA between them own 58% of Europe's main airframe manufacturer Airbus and will assemble 412 of the 620 Eurofighter aircraft ordered. They looked suited to launch the new European arms endeavour. But, in the midst of £220-a-night hotels with accompanying helicopter pads and South African golfing breaks, their executives could not agree on values of shares in the proposed merged company, nor could they agree on control over it. Would it be a British-German firm or a German-British firm?

Fearing that GEC would sell Marconi to the USA or France and challenge its lucrative British government orders, British Aerospace bought the business for £6.9 billion instead. German and French executives claimed they had been stabbed in the back and the route to European consolidation blocked. Now British Aerospace is second only to Lockheed Martin for weapons sales with \$16 billion a year. The nearest European rivals sell \$5 billion. British Aerospace is now Britain's biggest manufacturing company with 99,500 employees.

British Aerospace's sales to the US have increased from 12% of the total to 22%. It has straddled the trans-Atlantic and European positions. British Aerospace holds 35% of Saab of Sweden and is negotiating similar deals with Spain's Casa, Alenia of Italy and Norway's Kongsberg. Whatever the French or Germans do, British Aerospace presents them with a *fait accompli*; it intends to dictate the future course of the European defence industry and the City will not be sidelined.

There are 'left of centre' governments in 13 of the EU states. Writing in *The Independent*, 17 December 1998, Ken Livingstone states, 'We need to spell out quite clearly the benefits of Britain being part of a euro-currency bloc large enough to resist the attacks of speculators which have so often in the past derailed the plans of Labour governments.' Social democracy spreads the illusion of a progressive European project, all the better to allow the glants of finance capitalism to build a powerful imperialist contender, getting ready to challenge for the world title.

Poverty and inequality in Blair's Britain

New Labour, proclaims Blair, is directing a 'middle class revolution' to transform Britain. Labour's 10-year programme to tackle poverty and social exclusion will result in 'an expanded middle class, with ladders of opportunity for those of all backgrounds'. This ever-expanding middle class will 'include millions of people who traditionally see themselves as working class', laying the foundations for a new centre-left consensus that will keep New Labour governments in power for many years. Such is the propaganda. The social and economic reality, however, is very different, as DAVID YAFFE shows below.



The coming recession will only aggravate the economic and social circumstances that have produced this increasingly unjust, unequal and unstable society.

Sustaining the privileges of significant sections of the more prosperous working class and middle classes is the key to social stability in major capitalist countries like Britain. It is also the condition for winning elections. However, since the crisis of world capitalism began in the mid-1970s, it has become clear that those privileges can only be secured through an increasingly polarised and unequal society, that is, at the cost of the impoverishment of ever greater numbers of working class people. That is why New Labour has fundamentally continued with policies introduced by preceding Tory governments.

After one-and-a-half years of Labour in power, it is, therefore, no surprise to see that Labour's support among the more prosperous working class and middle class, as well as the rich, has either increased or remained steady, while among the poorer sections of the working class it has fallen. Labour has more than doubled its lead among the more prosperous voters in the South East (up 9 percentage points) and the AB social classes – business and financial executives, senior officials in national and local government and people in the main professions (+9) – and increased its lead (+4) among better-paid white collar workers (C1). On the other hand it has lost ground among council tenants (-8), the unemployed (-8), and DE social classes – people with semi-skilled or unskilled jobs and those living wholly on benefits (-8) and those in part-time work (-7). These results indicate that Blair's government is continuing to reproduce the social and economic polarisation it inherited.

Recently two publications have appeared which show the degree and extent of inequality, poverty and social exclusion in capitalist Britain. They give the essential background information necessary to understand the policies that Blair's government has adopted to discipline the poorer sections of the working class, while sustaining and even increasing support among the more prosperous working class, the middle classes and the rich.¹

Britain – an unequal society

Although there was significant economic growth in the years before the 1997 General Election, the proportion of people living in poverty, at below half average income, rose to 24% in 1995/7 or 14.1m people,² an increase of 9.1m on 1979. More than a third (34%) of all children, 4.8m, live below this poverty level, 3.2m more than in 1979. Much of the increase of those living in low income households results from the growth in the number of working age households where no one is in work. Nearly 20% of working age households have no working adult.

Of those living in poverty, 6.7m individuals, a little under half of the total, live in unemployed, single parent, or 'other'³ households with no working adult. This underlies the Labour government's determination to force the unemployed, single parents, the sick and disabled back into work through the Jobseeker's Allowance and other coercive schemes. Refusing to raise taxes for fear of alienating its middle class support, it has to cut state benefits and so harasses the poor, the sick and disabled off benefits and into lousy jobs at poverty rates of pay.

Income inequalities grew dramatically from 1979 to the early 1990s, and, following a slight reversal after 1992/3, they have started to rise again. While real average income rose 44% between 1979 and 1995/97, the income of the poorest 10% fell by 9%. The next poorest 40% saw their incomes rise between 5% and 31%,

well below the average. On the other hand, households with incomes above average have seen their incomes rise rapidly, the rise accelerating with growing incomes. Those in the top half of the income distribution had rises of more than 40% with the income of the richest 10% rising by a massive 70%. (See Table 1)

In 1979 the richest 10% had more than four times the income of the poorest 10%. By 1995/7 it was nearly eight times. Between 1979 and 1995/7 the share of total income of the top 10% had risen from 21% to 27%, while the share of the poorest 10% had fallen from 4% to 2.2%. The share of the top 50% had risen from 68% to 75% and the share of the bottom 50% fallen from 32% to 25%.

The divisions in society highlighted by these statistics are almost certainly underestimates. They do not cover the whole population. Excluded from the survey are people

in residential institutions and homeless people in bed and breakfast accommodation or sleeping rough. At the other end of the scale there is a shortfall of investment income compared with National Accounts, so income at the top levels of income distribution is understated. Finally, as we will show below, these fundamental divisions in society are class divisions, reinforced by government policies.

Class and income

The statistics covering socio-economic groups in the HBAI report give a good indication of the class divisions of those who work or have worked within the previous 12 months.⁴ They exclude the households where the head of the household has not worked for more than a year because they were unemployed, were sick or disabled or otherwise not available for work. The vast

majority of these belong to the working class poor. They also exclude pensioners. More than half pensioners have incomes in the bottom 40% of the income distribution.

Employers, managers and professionals (approximating to AB social groups), as well as intermediate or junior non-manual workers (C1) are predominantly at the top end of the income distribution (see Table 2). 51% of professionals had incomes in the top 20% of income distribution (top quintile). Skilled manual workers (C2) – the largest group of workers – were concentrated around the middle and second highest income distribution. On the other hand semi-skilled and unskilled workers (DE) had incomes predominantly in the bottom 40% of the income distribution, but with a significant proportion of them (one quarter) in the middle of the income distribution. The majority of those in work have relatively high incomes but there is a significant minority who, if not already living in poverty, would quickly find themselves there should economic conditions deteriorate.

In addition there is a great deal of evidence of class divisions on geographical lines, a North-South divide, if London is excluded. Those living in Wales, all English regions from the Midlands northwards and, to a lesser extent, Scotland were underrepresented at the top of the income distribution, with Wales and regions north of the Midlands overrepresented in the bottom fifth of incomes. On the other hand, the South East and eastern regions were over represented at the top of the income distribution. Inequalities were greatest in London, which had the highest proportion of individuals living in the bottom fifth of the income distribution but also was overrepresented at the top. Significantly it is among those in the high income groups and prosperous regions of the country where support for New Labour has increased and among those in low income groups and less prosperous regions where it has fallen. This points to the class character of government policies whether Tory or Labour.

Class divisions will widen

Capitalism inevitably creates inequality and poverty. Capitalist governments if they want to stay in power reinforce such trends. Since the mid-1970s a number of developments have occurred which lie behind the growing inequalities and class divisions in Britain.

The growing crisis of the capitalist system worldwide has seen a rapid rise in unemployment in most major capitalist countries. Official figures for unemployment disguise the real trend. In Britain, unemployment stands at around 1.8m, yet it has been estimated that 4.2m people without work want a job. 40% of 50-65 year olds are not working. Capitalism

now is unable to offer decent jobs to ever greater numbers of workers. 75% of jobs unemployed people get on leaving the claimant count are temporary, part-time, self-employed or much less skilled than previous jobs. Many jobs are at poverty levels of pay. 4.7m workers were getting less than £4 an hour in 1998. Over the past five years temporary employment has grown by half-a-million* to 1.7m jobs. The Jobseeker's Allowance simply reinforces these trends and is a central plank of Labour policy to force people off benefits into low paid jobs.

As unemployment has grown and the numbers relying on state benefits have increased, so state benefits have been cut. Rising in line with prices instead of earnings, this policy has been a major contributory factor in increasing inequality and driving millions of people into poverty. Labour will continue with this iniquitous policy. The government has announced that means tested benefits will rise next year by only 2.1% and pensions by 3.2% although average earnings rose 4.5% in the year to April 1998.

While state benefits have been cut, governments have reinforced widening pay differentials through their taxation policies. The reduction of income tax since 1979 has seen a massive redistribution of wealth towards high earners. The subsidies for mortgages; the sale of public utilities and the distribution of shares to the better off; the sale of the highest quality council houses at massive discount; and the tax relief on saving schemes for the better off (PEPs, TESSAs) have all sustained and reinforced the privileges of the more prosperous working class and middle classes. Stocks and shares, TESSAs and PEPs are overwhelmingly held by those in the top 40% of the income distribution. One third of households have no savings at all. Labour will not significantly change any of these developments.

Finally, even the relative high standard of living for many working class and middle class families has been achieved, often at the expense of social and family life, through a growth in two-earner households, longer working hours and evening and weekend work. 1.2m people have two jobs – two thirds of them women – almost double the level of 1984. British workers work the longest hours in the European Union with one third working longer than a 48 hour week. The average weekly overtime worked by full-time workers has increased from four to seven hours for men and from three to six hours for women since 1988. One in two working men and one in three working women work some or most Sundays and one in six workers now works in the evening (*The Guardian* 4 January 1999).

The coming recession will only aggravate the economic and social circumstances that have produced this increasingly unjust, unequal and unstable society. Blair's 'middle class revolution' will come to grief in confrontation with the overwhelming reality of British capitalism.

Table 1 Changes in real income by decile group 1979-1995/7 In April 1998 prices

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	Mean
Income (AHC) % change	-8	5	12	23	21	36	41	46	54	70	44
£ per week											
1979	81	104	121	138	157	177	199	227	263	347	185
1995/7	74	100	136	171	206	241	281	330	406	521	267

(D1-D10 represent 10% bands of the population (deciles), with D1 the poorest 10% band etc)

Table 2

Socio-economic group	Net disposable household income					Total
	Bottom quintile	Second quintile	Third quintile	Fourth quintile	Top quintile	
	percentages					millions
Employers and managers	5	7	17	25	48	6.8
Professionals	3	6	15	25	51	2.3
Intermediate & Junior non-manual	9	12	22	28	28	7.8
Skilled manual	12	18	27	28	17	8.1
Semi-skilled manual and personal services	21	23	25	21	10	5.1
Unskilled and other	22	25	25	16	18	1.5

(Note: Quintiles are those for the whole population; 20% bands ranked by income)

1. Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1979-1996/7 Department of Social Security 1998 and Monitoring poverty and social exclusion Labour's Inheritance Catherine Howarth et al Joseph Rowntree Foundation December 1998.

2. All statistics from HBAI, where available, are given after housing costs (AHC) and include the self-employed. In HBAI, 1995/96 is a two-year average of 1995/6 and 1996/7. I have written it as 1995/7. Average income in every case is the contemporary one for that year. Household income is disposable income adjusted for household size and composition.

3. This includes the long-term sick and disabled, students and early retired.

4. They exclude the 5.9m self-employed. Nearly a fifth of self-employed households live in poverty at less than half average income.

CUBA VIN

REVOLUTION TIGHTENS ITS



This year's brigade was in Cuba at an exciting time – not only for the opportunity to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Revolution in the small rural community of Fomento, dancing to the beat of the sound system provided by Rock around the Blockade. It was also a time when Cuban communists themselves were reaffirming their commitment to the Revolution and taking measures to protect its gains against the encroachment of capitalist mechanisms. Just before the brigade arrived in Cuba, the Union of Young Communists (UJC) had held its VII Congress, analysing and discussing its role as the vanguard of Cuban youth. Alongside this, measures were being taken by the government to clamp down on crime and antisocial behaviour. The 16 brigadistas picked coffee alongside a contingent of pre-university students, visited schools, an orphanage, family doctors and a children's centre and a committee for the defence of the Revolution (CDR). We were offered constant opportunities to meet and discuss with Cubans the realities of their Revolution. We were overwhelmed by the openness, generosity and revolutionary enthusiasm that we found. As one brigadista says, we return 'rearmed' to fight the battles that confront us here in Britain, inspired by the example of Cuba's socialist state.

Last year, Rock around the Blockade raised £5,000 to buy a sound system for Fomento and contribute to discos in Santa Clara and Sancti Spiritus. Over the next year we will continue to work closely with the UJC in Cuba to provide another sound system, this time for the eastern part of the island, and build another brigade. We will also be stepping up our campaign against the illegal US blockade, focusing on our Boycott Bacardi campaign and collecting toys for the UJC's toy library project. To get involved in our work, come to our meetings or fill in the box on this

TANIA JACKSON in Havana writes:

I thought it would be a disappointment, coming back to Havana after ten incredible days with the brigade in the province of Sancti Spiritus, where CDRs have 100% membership, towns have no prostitution nor pimping and everyone is united in building and defending socialism.

Havana sometimes seems worlds apart, particularly to visitors who inevitably see the worst aspects of Cuban society – the prostitutes who home in on tourist areas, the pimps, the incessant touts of paladares (family-run restaurants) and hawkers of cigars and rum (see FRFI 145 December 1998/January 1999 Defending socialism – fighting prostitution in Cuba).

Cuba stepped up its fight against crime and antisocial activity towards the end of 1998, closing down nearly all the dollar discos in Havana to combat drug trafficking and prostitution and only reopening them when appropriate controls were in place. Prostitution was almost completely eliminated, with the centre for prostitutes in Havana having received 8,714 women by November 1998. These women received any necessary medical and psychological treatment before being sent home, 59% of them coming from other

provinces. A Ministry of the Interior report detailed 219 cases of men being charged with pimping, 190 of whom were sentenced.

On 5 January Fidel Castro addressed Cuba's Revolutionary National Police on the 40th anniversary of their constitution (summarised in Granma International 24 January). He spelled out what the country has been doing to fight illegal and antisocial activity and what they will be doing in 1999. He acknowledged the importance of the police in maintaining internal order throughout the 40 years of the Revolution, without which the gains the country had won in the long and hard battle for socialism would be lost.

A major theme in Fidel's address was international drug trafficking involving Cuba. Cuba's location on the route between drug-producing areas of Latin America and consumption areas in North America and Europe puts it in great danger of being a transit point for drug trafficking, as it was before the Revolution. Recently it was claimed that three tons of high-grade cocaine discovered in Colombia were destined for Cuba. Fidel restated Cuba's willingness to cooperate in the fight against drug trafficking: 'Had we been provided with a bit of information beforehand, and not through the public wire services, given that we have

signed co-operation agreements, we could have provided a little more help.' 117 foreigners are currently serving sentences for drug trafficking with 48 more awaiting trial. 279 shipments of drugs were confiscated by November 1998.

Since Fidel's speech there has been an absolute clampdown on illegal and antisocial activity in Havana, welcomed by the majority of ordinary people. Police reinforcements arrive in busloads from other provinces; there are police on every street corner of the formerly crime-prone regions of Vedado, Central and Old Havana. They now check nearly all ID cards to identify those living or working in Havana without permission, who form the majority of those involved in antisocial activities. Havana is almost completely clear of prostitutes, pimps, hawkers and touts. Even car drivers now drive by the book!

The clampdown is being extended to the intermediaries who sell produce without permission in the farmers' markets and have the potential to emerge as a new merchant class. Fidel announced that produce could only be sold by its producers. This led to the paralysis of Havana's markets – indicating the enormity of the problem – with only the odd few producers capable of getting to Havana making a

killing, such as one who sold two sack-loads of garlic at inflated prices, on a day when only that and oranges were available. This pronouncement has been relaxed for the time being, until producers are in a position to be able to sell their own produce. The agricultural produce fair held towards the end of every month in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución, so that producers can sell directly and thus more cheaply, was much larger in January, with many more people out to buy. Prices were indeed cheaper, about half those of the regular markets.

Fidel declared that Cuba's fight against illegal and undesirable activities should be won with organisation, discipline and intelligence and without violence. Heavy sentencing exists for crimes such as rape; international drug traffickers can face capital punishment or at least life imprisonment, often with a 30-year minimum, and convicted pimps receive long sentences that can be of 20 years or more. Against prostitution itself, Fidel restated that there should not be penal sanctions. 'It truly hurts a great deal that in a country that has given all boys and girls the opportunity to study; it hurts a great deal that in a country that has done so much to eliminate discrimination against women, although it still has not totally achieved this;... where 65% of the

Build one, two and many brigades

Yani Cruz Gutsens, the protocol attaché for UJC International Relations, accompanied the brigade in Fomento. We owe her a deep debt of gratitude for her untiring and invaluable work as our translator, trouble-shooter, comrade and friend. Here she talks to FRFI about the importance of brigades to Cuba.

We learn a lot from brigades, which bring with them first-hand information of what life is like in their country – often entirely different from what we read in the newspapers of that country. The brigades also need to learn from us, to see what we, the people of Cuba, have gained.

You know that we are a socialist country. We often meet people who think Cuba is a dictatorship and that we have no democracy even though they are doing work to help us. Although they are friendly, they are not politically convinced of our reality, so they need to come to Cuba to see the truth with their own eyes. We are only too happy to show them the gains and the realities of 40 years of Revolution.

We know that it is not easy, living in a capitalist country like Britain, to support the ideals of socialism.

Your financial resources are limited and you do not have millions of members, but yet you sustain a national campaign. You do this not only because we are a third world country but because we mean something more than that for you and others. We are like a symbol, an example, for people throughout the world.

We are proud of the work you do. We really need things like the sound systems and we hope that your work continues to grow so that maybe you can bring two brigades a year, with two sound systems. It is so important, not solely for the sound systems, but the political work. You have to teach people's minds, convince them of what we have achieved.

Your government is separated from the people. We know that Rock around the Blockade does not support the Labour Party and we appreciate that, because we know that it is a party that does not represent the working class. Being socialist in a capitalist country is very courageous because there are lots of people who support your government because they benefit from capitalism and we know that. That's why we appreciate so much the work you are doing.



HELEN

When we told Cubans that in the British press, Fidel is referred to as 'dictator', they shrugged off the information with a smile and began to explain again about their grass roots system of democracy. Every person proudly told us about their own participation in the representative organisations and their responsibilities to the collective. We asked them if, when Fidel died, that would signify the end of the Revolution. No! certainly not, they asserted. 'I'll still be here' we were told, 'and so will she and they will too! We have many communists to carry forward the revolutionary work of Fidel.'

RICHARD

Cuba's greatest strength is its people. Outside Havana nearly everyone you meet wants to tell you about themselves and their love of their country. This is real freedom. Freedom from hunger, poverty and illiteracy. We pass a sign which says '11 million children in the world are homeless, not one of them is Cuban'. When we asked what any building was, Juan Carlos often said: 'Do you want to go in?' and we found ourselves in a nursery school or a discotheque. 'You have to keep dancing for another half hour', they told us here, 'so they can prepare your lunch'. Flexible, principled, inventive, collective, unmaterialistic – how much of that is around in the capitalist West?

MADE WE GRIP

technical workforce is made up by women and where so much has been done to give women dignity, along come foreigners, along come Cubans who trick them, dominate them, corrupt them.'

I was recently witness to the way Cuba deals with undesirable activity: while picnicking with friends in Parque Lenin, we were annoyed to see many state-owned trucks being driven straight into the lake to be washed, where children had until then been bathing. A delegation arrived, headed by an elderly gentleman who came round to stop this activity. It turned out to be Ramón Castro, Fidel's elder brother, responsible for environmental protection.

Incredibly, instead of the stern telling off that I expected, and potential arrest of the wrongdoers, Ramón asked the children to explain to the offending adults why their action was wrong: 'You see, if you wash your lorries here, it will kill the fish and damage the environment'. As Ramón later explained to us, when hearing we represented a group of British communists, 'we must combat such vices with persuasion, not aggression. Involving children in educating adults of the error of their ways is important as they are the hope for the future.'



RORY
Cuba presented many challenges to the complexity of our lives in Britain, our comfort, superficial as it may be, and our 'contentment'. By contrast, I was struck by the simplicity of socialism in action. In a poor country, I found riches greater than mere wealth. In Cuba, socialism is walking the streets without fear, it is dancing before beginning the day's work (honest... I saw it happen!), it is inviting you into its home to meet the folks. In Cuba, socialism puts food on everyone's table but left me hungry... for socialism at home!

Children of the Revolution

Cuba's excellent education system does not stop when the school bell rings at the end of the day. There are 146 Pioneers' centres in Cuba for children aged nine to 15. We visited a Pioneers' Explorer Camp which serves 46 schools in the area. During term-time children stay over the weekend and in the holidays for a whole week. In July and August the centre is in continuous use.

The Pioneers' movement started in 1971 to enable children to enjoy being close to nature and learn to live in the wild. They are taught that the land that nourishes them must always be respected. At least a dozen different ways of making a fire were shown to us and we learned how to roast a bird or a pig on a spit. There was a shelter made from palm leaves where the children could sleep overnight if they wished.

The War of the People hut contained wooden replicas of guns, landmines, grenades and gas masks where children learn that the defence of Cuba's national sovereignty is a duty of all its citizens. We walked over a rope-bridge across a small ravine to the Hall of Heroes which had photos of Che and other revolutionaries who had taken part in the local area's liberation. There is no separation between activities for girls and boys and all of these facilities are free, paid for by the state.

There are also Pioneers' Palaces which help young people choose a vocation. There are areas for engineering, medical, secretarial and agricultural work, teaching and so on. We presented the centre with toys, pencils and artwork for the children to play with in the TV and video room. As we left, I thought of my own country where a boy was stabbed a mile from where I live a few years ago, in a rundown area in London with no youth clubs. The Cuban state is incredibly generous with its young people.

Richard Roques

SUSIE

The 40th anniversary of the Revolution was unforgettable. In a small rural town in the centre of Cuba, 600 young Cubans queued outside their new disco, 'El Largo', in Fomento. 16 British brigadistas waited excitedly to open the disco and start the celebrations. This was the night we had dreamed of. All the fundraising and political activities had paid off: they had lacked a disco and Rock around the Blockade had provided one. The young people piled in, the lights began to flash, the music started. We must continue this important solidarity work with socialist Cuba, supporting the UJC and raising money for sound systems for Cuban youth and at the same time create a movement against capitalism. Viva Rock around the Blockade!

JIM

I had read and heard much about Cuba before visiting, but in Cuba the reality surpasses the rhetoric. The Cuban youth are strong willed, confident and politically aware. When they vote, they know what they are voting for; ignorance is not entertained. Culture and consciousness dance hand in hand. The Jim that left Britain was getting weary. The Jim that returns is reinvigorated as a political revolutionary, ready to fight hard in the Battle for Peace and Justice. I return home now.

KATY

The minute we land on Cuban soil, a smile starts to spread across my face, and Nigel says to me later 'I haven't seen you stop smiling since we got here', but I can't stop. There is a feeling around that makes you open wide, that these people who have so little are so generous, that anyone you speak to will answer your questions honestly, they are free and eager to criticise, but also to praise the amazing achievements they themselves have worked towards. People laugh incredulously at our tales of England and our extreme lack of salsa technique. And we all talk about how capitalism can't survive much longer, and when it goes the world will be a lot happier. I get back to this country and see unsmiling faces in town, people grimly and determinedly shopping their Saturdays away, but the smile still hasn't left my face.

DAVE

The most important aspect of Cuban life I discovered is the role played by the youth in defending the socialist revolution. From as young as eight years old they are taught to organise, defend and most importantly ask questions of the revolution. Free education until the end of university, and beyond. Voluntary agricultural camps, great political awareness and outdoor pursuits, including lessons in civil defence, guarantee a security for Cuba in its fight against imperialist world aggression. The Cuban youth are respected, not exploited. They are strong, forward-thinking and informed. The youth of Cuba are the socialist revolution.

Brigade visits family doctor's clinic

In Cuba, unlike in Britain, people are not ashamed of discussing their health problems with other people. As a result problems are accepted and shared socially within the community. Abortion is not stigmatised, leaving no pressure on teenagers to have children. There were no teenage mothers in the area where we were staying - no young women going through childbirth before their bodies were fully mature nor having responsibility for a child while they could be studying and enjoying their youth.

When asked about waiting for appointments at the family doctor's clinic we visited, the doctors and nurses seemed not to understand what we meant. The doctor explained that it wasn't necessary to make an appointment; if necessary a patient could even be treated in their own home. This was a clinic in a rural area of the municipality of Fomento.

In most third world countries, the standard of health care in rural communities is appalling with virtually no nearby access to doctors or hospitals. For instance, the Cuban doctors who went to Honduras after Hurricane Mitch are operating in areas that haven't seen a doctor for years. This has embarrassed Honduran doctors so much that the president of the Honduran Medical Association recently suggested that 'foreign doctors operating here' should have to apply for licences to practise, a process that takes over three months. He was greeted with widespread con-

demnation by local people.

It was explained to us that in Cuba, the health system, working on a preventative basis, has enabled them to eradicate diphtheria, tuberculosis, rubella, malaria and meningitis B, which continue causing deaths and disabilities in other third-world and many industrialised countries. This particular clinic boasted 0% maternal and infant mortality rates. Infant mortality for Cuba as a whole in 1998 was 7.1 per 1,000 live births.

During my recent stay with a rural community in Guatemala, a 15-day-old baby died in the first week, possibly from the effects of being given a vaccination for a six-month-old baby as the doctor couldn't be bothered to come back at the appropriate time. Later, a 10-year-old boy was found unconscious and feverish. To get him to a doctor's clinic involved hitching in the back of a pick-up truck to the nearest town 45 km away where the doctor forced him to wait for over half an hour before he saw him. In the hospital he was left lying in his own vomit for hours before a nurse cleaned him up.

In comparison with Cuba, the infant mortality figure for Latin America and the Caribbean is 33 on average, with Guatemala being one of the worst. The average for an industrialised country is six; the world average is 59 and the United States has eight infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Lily



NEIL

Being on the brigade brought home to me the importance of international solidarity and the critical exchange of revolutionary ideas and experience. Cuba has fought hard to maintain some of the most progressive and effective social policies in the 'Third World', such as free health care and education for all - in the face of the violent and illegal USA blockade. As a youth worker in Britain I was struck by the amount of time and space given over to young people - localised youth centres with sports, recreational and cultural resources were common. Young people - especially in rural areas - are politically literate, actively involved in their communities, and frequently unionised.

JASON

My overriding memory is of a society that works collectively in all areas of life, where the notion of individualism is alien and where capitalist diseases such as racism do not exist. Every visit we made, whether to a school, clinic, daycare centre or orphanage, all demonstrated the way the Cuban people work for the benefit of their country and their Revolution. Such abiding memories of an unselfish collectivism in Cuba strengthen my own determination to take forward the struggle for socialism here in Britain.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE BRIGADE

LONDON
Thursday 11 Feb, 7.30pm Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (Hollborn tube)
LINCOLN
Monday 22 Feb - day and evening activity
DONCASTER
Tuesday 23 Feb, 7.30pm

For venues where none stated and details of meetings in Cambridge, Canterbury, Manchester, Greenock, Dundee, Airdrie and Edinburgh please contact the campaign on the following numbers:
Midlands: Jim 01400 230151
Northwest: Nigel 01254 679605
All other areas: 0171 837 1688

JOIN ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE!

☐ I would like to join Rock around the Blockade (£10 waged, £4 low waged, £2 unwaged/student)
☐ I enclose a donation of £
towards your work in solidarity with Cuba (Cheques/POs payable to Rock around the Blockade)

Name _____
Address _____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o SCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Todos los participantes de la brigada de Rock around the Blockade ofrecemos nuestras gracias calurosas a todos los cubanos que nos dieron inspiración, amor y camaradería durante nuestro tiempo en Cuba. En particular: el departamento de relaciones internacionales de la UJC Juan Carlos y el buró provincial de la UJC de Sancti Spiritus Yari Cruz Gutsens, el protocol attache de la UJC internacional Ernesto Jaquinet y Zoe Jaquinet ~~(señalamos)~~ Reinaldo Mancebo y su familia y todos nos amigos en Fomento quienes nos dieron una hospitalidad tan calurosa

Muchas gracias a todos!

'War against the warmakers'

What was unexpected was the capitulation of socialist organisations in Europe affiliated to the Second International. At congress after congress in the years leading up to the war, these parties had pledged to oppose the coming war. In 1907 the Stuttgart Congress of the International agreed that 'should war break out socialists must do all they can to take advantage of the economic and political crisis precipitated by the war to rouse the masses and accelerate the downfall of capitalist class domination'.

Yet when war was declared, they rushed to take 'sides with their General Staffs, their government and their bourgeois against the proletariat' (Lenin 1915, *Collapse of The Second International*). In Germany, France and Russia leading socialists like Kautsky urged the working class to rally round the national flag. In Britain, the Labour Party, TUC and Co-operative Movement all pledged their support for the Allies. The TUC offered an industrial truce for the duration.

Maclean and imperialist war

Maclean's response was exemplary. On the day war broke out he chalked the streets with slogans against the war and the government. Within five days a protest demonstration was organised on Glasgow Green. From then on Maclean and his comrades literally fought on the streets, at factory gates and outside army recruitment offices to expose the real causes of the war and its effect on the working class. Maclean openly declared 'war against the war makers!', stating 'Our first business is to hate the British capitalist system... Plunderers versus plunderers with the workers as pawns... it is our business as socialists to develop "class patriotism", refusing to murder one another for a sordid world capitalism' (17 September 1914).

Glasgow: city of empire

Having identified capitalism and colonial competition as the motives behind the war, Maclean struggled to develop an anti-war movement in the second city of the British Empire, a significant section of whose working class was engaged in building merchant ships for empire trade and battleships to defend it. They were therefore directly dependent on imperialism. The Clyde was also the biggest centre of industrial production in the British Empire, with a population of one million in 1914. Alongside the skilled engineers, fitters, boilermakers and shipwrights who were well organised into trade unions, there were masses of manual workers of Irish and Scots Highland origin driven to the area through poverty and the land clearances of the previous century. By 1914 a large proportion of local production was connected with war-ships. This trade brought other munitions work, like shell production, in its train. 10% of the membership of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers - 20,000 workers - were concentrated in 31 factories on Clydeside, of which by 1917 all but 10 were directly concerned in some form of marine engineering or munitions work. Solid union organisation, skill shortages and a critical role in the imperialist economy had secured for these workers high wages, status and job security. This was 'the blue blood of the working class': an aristocracy of labour.

The First World War was not unexpected. In 1919 John Maclean stated 'We Marxists knew the war with Germany was coming, as both Germany and Britain were conducting a life and death struggle to dominate the world and its markets'. Lenin had earlier characterised the war as 'between two groups of oppressors, between two freebooters over the division of their booty'. **MICHAEL MCGREGOR** continues the tribute to John Maclean, Revolutionary Communist, on the 75th anniversary of his death, with an account of Maclean's campaign against imperialist war.

The Clyde Workers Committee

In parallel with Maclean's ceaseless anti-war agitation, a militant shop stewards movement emerged, based on the Clyde workshops engaged in producing war materials. The first strike of the war began in February 1915 over a wage claim, which, despite the opposition of the official union, the owners, and the rabid hostility of the patriotic newspapers, held out for three weeks and eventually gained the workers a penny on the hourly rate. The government conceded this as a 'war bonus', of the sort that had already been paid to railwaymen. However the needs of war production hardened its stance, and throughout 1915, shop stewards were dismissed for 'slacking', and some sentenced to three months in gaol. However, union organisation and impressive solidarity forced a temporary retreat.

Yet such militancy was far from being the basis of an anti-war movement on the Clyde. These workers were, as JT Murphy asserts in *Preparing for Power*, 'demanding a price for carrying on the war'. He singled out the example of John Muir, a major figure on the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC) and editor of its newspaper *The Worker*, and notoriously pro-war. When Lloyd George came to Glasgow at Christmas 1915 to address the workers, Muir boldly laid out their demands: 'the control of dilution by the workers engaged in industry in terms which would not be detrimental to the workers in general and especially the skilled workers, whose position was shattered by dilution.' His speech did not challenge the war.

The struggle widens

Maclean's stature as an anti-war agitator and revolutionary socialist grew enormously in this first full year of war. At the beginning of 1915, Maclean and the anti-war section of the British Socialist Party had organised meetings all over Glasgow, the Clyde and Scotland. Sunday night in Glasgow's Bath Street became a focal point. Surrounded by recruiting posters, Maclean thundered against the war, calling for revolution against the warmongers. He spoke to hundreds, then thousands of workers as the horrific slaughter on the front continued. An outraged citizen complained to the *Glasgow Herald* in October 1915 that 'at 9.30 last night at the foot of Kilbowie Road, I heard a man preaching treason. He was telling a crowd of working men that the war was not being fought in the defence of Belgium, but in the interests of greedy capitalists, who wish to seize Germany's trade. What organisation of Germans or pro-Germans sent this man? Why is he allowed to go this way?... Are there no men in Clydebanks to stop him without waiting for the law to act?'

In fact, the Glasgow police were not idle. They alleged obstruction against the meetings, brought along rival speakers and encouraged 'patriotic' organisations to attack the meetings. By autumn the state stepped up



its harassment of Maclean and the anti-war campaign. Charges followed: 'using language likely to cause a breach of the peace', offences under DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) such as 'making statements likely to prejudice recruiting'. Plainclothes police were now a regular feature of the meetings and Maclean helpfully pointed them out to the audience.

His courageous and principled stance attracted the anti-war members of other organisations. The defence of democratic rights became part of the battle. Free Speech Committees were formed. Demonstrations were held outside the courts where charges were being heard. Workers and socialists gathered outside Maclean's trial on 27 October 1915. It was a fine or five days in jail for saying 'I have been enlisted in the Socialist Army for 15 years, the only army worth fighting for. God damn all other armies.' A month later Maclean was dismissed from his teaching job despite his supporters, among them shipyard workers, 'visiting' the School Board meeting.

The rent strike

While these struggles were filling the streets of Glasgow with vigorous protest, the landlords had been racking up rent. The wives and dependants of soldiers, whose sufferings Maclean had been concerned with since the war began, organised together with other working class women of the Clyde to withhold the increases and physically defend those facing eviction. Maclean's paper, *The Vanguard*, urged a full rent strike as the movement spread, reaching into the factories and shipyards. On the day of the trial of 18 workers who had taken this step, demonstrations came in from all over. The housing schemes and factories were marching. One column stopped at Maclean's school and car-

ried him, shoulder high, to the court. Ten thousand people surrounded the building while Maclean and others spoke. This was the birth of working class power and the ruling class acted swiftly. A telephone call to Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, secured the immediate halt to court action and the introduction of a Rent Restriction Act.

Maclean recognised the significance of this development. The limits of trade unionism were being challenged. The strength of unity demonstrated by the working class communities over the rent issue had created the conditions where the working class organised in the factories and yards felt confident enough to use its power for wider issues. However, Maclean had a serious warning. Analysing the role of the CWC in December 1915, he argued 'Whether the Clyde Workers Committee as constituted today is able or willing to cope with the situation is doubtful; but it is just as well to give it a further chance with the added support of miners and railwaymen. However just as this unofficial committee views with suspicion the official committees of the various unions and attempts to act as a driving force, we warn comrades that they ought to adopt the same attitude towards the unofficial committees and see to it that it pushes ahead. If it still clings on to academic discussion and futile proposals, it is their business to take the initiative into their own hands as they did in the case of the recent rent strike.'

Conscription and repression

The day after the rent strike victory Maclean started five days in prison for refusing to pay his fine. On the day of his release miners from Lanark marched to meet him and the demonstration went on to the shipyards at Govan, where a huge meeting carried

resolutions condemning the government, the Munitions Act, and conscription. The threat of conscription sharpened the anti-war message and now thousands were prepared to listen. Repression intensified: the authorities cancelled the letting of the City Hall before an anti-conscription meeting at which Maclean and Sylvia Pankhurst were due to speak. A near riot ensued as Maclean threatened to organise the workers to break down the doors. Lloyd George and 'traitor' Arthur Henderson of the Labour Party had to suffer public humiliation at the hands of thousands of Clyde workers when they spoke in Glasgow that December. The Conscription Bill was brought before Parliament on 5 January 1916; socialists redoubled their efforts against the war and Maclean was the centre of the anti-war agitation. The ILP paper *Forward* was banned for printing an account of the Lloyd George meeting whilst Maclean's *Vanguard* was seized on 8 January 1916 and the CWC's *The Worker* closed down.

Maclean addressed the crowds at Bath Street on 8 February and after the meeting was detained in Edinburgh Castle. William Gallagher, chair of the CWC, and John Muir were also arrested for writing, it was claimed, a 'seditious' article. But Maclean's warning about the CWC was correct as it refused to challenge the first prosecutions under the Munitions Act. In the face of the repression, the CWC recommended a return to work. Workers in the yards and factories demanded action but the CWC did nothing. At a meeting of the CWC on 25 March a motion to declare a strike in the Clyde District was put forward; William Gallagher as chair ruled it out of order 'as it was against the accepted aims of the CWC'. This was the same Gallagher who was to become a founder of the Communist Party of Great Britain and its MP between 1935 and 1950, and whom Maclean had criticised for not speaking out against the war.

At their trial, management testified to John Muir's commitment to the war effort, whilst Gallagher stated that the CWC could not call a strike and that he had no desire to impede production. In the end, by not opposing the war, the CWC could not even defend its own narrow interests. On 11 April 1916, Maclean was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. He had not concealed his anti-war activity and had proudly proclaimed his revolutionary socialism. He and his comrades had reached out to working class forces beyond the traditional organised workers.

In the end, no anti-war movement was to emerge on the Clyde of the character of the Irish movement under the leadership of Connolly. Maclean's imprisonment saw to that. Yet his stance was recognised internationally. Lenin stated 'The world working class revolution was first begun with engagements by isolated combatants representing with unequalled courage all the honest elements of official "Socialism" a socialism rotten to the core which is in reality nothing but social chauvinism. Liebknecht in Germany... Maclean... such are the best known of these isolated heroes who assumed the heavy task of precursors of the revolution.'

The first part of this series appeared in FRF 146 and part three will be published in the next issue.

Rosa Luxemburg: murdered by social democracy

Undoubtedly many communists agree with such sentiments, but today, 80 years after her murder what relevance do Luxemburg's views have for communists? On at least three central points her views are essential for communists. First, her belief in the centrality of class struggle in the battle for emancipation from capitalism and imperialism. Second, her internationalism which recognised that national 'solutions' however 'socialist' the rhetoric used to advance such solutions, were inadequate in the era of the capitalist world market, of imperialism. While imperialism exists socialism is in danger. Third, that the working-class makes its own history, as she made clear in her final article published a day before her murder:

'...the leadership can and must be newly created by the masses from the masses. The masses are the decisive ones, they are the rock out of which the final victory of the Revolution will be constructed.'

These views are similar to those expressed by Lenin when he wrote of the 1905 Moscow uprising:

'Over the heads of the organisations, the mass proletarian struggle developed from a strike to an uprising... The proletariat sensed sooner than its leaders the change in the objective conditions of the struggle and the need for a transition from the strike to an uprising.'

Rosa Luxemburg's insistence on the centrality of class struggle continued throughout her political life. In Russian Poland she was the theoretician of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), a party which for a couple of years after the 1905 Revolution became a mass (40,000 members), multi-national (25% of its members were Germans), revolutionary Marxist party. However it is for her role in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), that Rosa Luxemburg is better known.

Before the First World War the SPD was considered to be the leading Marxist party of the Second International. In electoral terms (it won 35% of votes cast in the 1912 elections), party membership (1,085,905 members in 1914) and trade union support (the Free Trade Unions had 1,502,811 members in 1914) it was unrivalled. Whilst the SPD did suffer from government restrictions and maintained formal Marxist positions its practice became increasingly routine and its leadership, itself becoming more right-wing, began to adapt to the growing conservatism and militarism of German society. In 1909 Karl Kautsky, regarded as the pre-eminent Marxist theoretician of the day, responded to the growth of reaction in both the SPD and German society with his 'strategy of attrition' which basically meant that Marxists should preserve what workers had already achieved. Luxemburg broke with Kautsky's passivity preferring to rely on Marx's method:

'... the dialectical materialist method of social enquiry, a method for which no phenomena, or principles, are fixed and unchanging, for which there is no dogma... and for which

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered in Berlin on 15 January 1919 by the right-wing, operating with the approval of the Social Democratic government of the recently established Republic. Two weeks earlier when the German Communist Party (KPD) had been founded, Rosa Luxemburg situated the KPD firmly in the tradition of Karl Marx:

'We are again at Marx's side, under his banner. When we declare in our programme: the immediate task of the proletariat is nothing less than... to make socialism fact and reality, to eliminate capitalism root and branch, then we place ourselves on the same ground on which Marx and Engels stood in 1848 and from which they... never diverged.'

every historical "truth" is subject to, a perpetual and remorseless criticism by actual historical developments'. Rosa Luxemburg, *Foreword to The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement*

Unfortunately Luxemburg's correct analysis of where the SPD and Kautsky were headed counted for little in the labyrinthine world of SPD 'politics' and intrigue. The First World War saw the SPD capitulate before German imperialism and militarism. As Lenin wrote to Shlyapnikov in October 1914:

'Rosa Luxemburg was right: she realised long ago that Kautsky was a time-serving theorist, serving the majority of the party, serving opportunism in short. There is nothing more deleterious and dangerous for the intellectual independence of the proletariat than the repulsive and disgusting hypocrisy of Kautsky, who glosses over everything and attempts to lull the awakening conscience of the workers with sophistry and pseudo-scientific verbosity.' (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 35)

While it is true that Lenin and Luxemburg had differences, for instance over national self-determination, the nature of imperialism and the mass party, these were differences among revolutionaries, differences on how the working class becomes the ruling class. On the fundamental question of revolutionary opposition to the imperialist war Rosa Luxemburg was as one with Lenin and John MacLean. Unfortunately, like John MacLean, Luxemburg spent most of the war years in prison. Despite imprisonment Luxemburg participated in the Marxist, anti-war International Group, later the Spartacus Group. In 1915, while imprisoned, she wrote a searing indictment of the imperialist war -



The crisis in the German Social Democracy, better known as the *Junius Pamphlet*. It was published in 1916 during a brief spell of freedom:

'Imperialist bestiality has been let loose to devastate the fields of Europe, and there is one incidental accompaniment for which the "cultured world" has neither heart nor conscience - the mass slaughter of the European proletariat. It is a deadly blow against the power which holds the whole future of humanity, the only power which can save the values of the past and carry them on into a newer and better human society. Capitalism has revealed its true features; it betrays to the world that it has lost its historical justification, that its continued existence can no

longer be reconciled with the progress of mankind.

'The madness will cease and the bloody product of hell come to an end only when the workers of Germany and France, of Great Britain and Russia awaken from their frenzy, extend to each other the hand of friendship, and drown the bestial chorus of imperialist hyenas with the thunderous battle cry of the modern working-class movement: "Workers of the World Unite!"' Rosa Luxemburg, *The mass strike: the political party and the trade unions and the Junius Pamphlet*

Although opponents of the war, in Germany and elsewhere, were always in a minority, nevertheless opposition grew throughout the war.

On May Day 1916 Karl Liebknecht, a Spartacus leader, led a demonstration of almost 10,000 against the war in Berlin. His demand on that day 'Down with war! Down with the government!' resulted in his arrest and a two-and-a-half-year prison sentence. On 28 June 1916, the day Liebknecht was sentenced, 55,000 Berlin munitions workers struck in protest and demonstrations took place in Stuttgart and there were further strikes in Brunswick and Bremen. By the end of October 1918 sections of the German Navy mutinied and on 4 November seized the town of Kiel setting up a Workers' and Sailors' Council. In the next few days Workers' and Soldiers' Councils began to take over towns and cities in various parts of Germany. To head off

this growing movement and with the example of Russia very much in mind, an SPD leader, Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed the German Republic on 9 November and another Social Democrat, Ebert, was illegally appointed Chancellor.

On the same day Rosa Luxemburg was finally freed from prison. At this time the fundamental problem of the revolutionary left was the lack of strong, unified leadership to give direction to the revolutionary movement. The declaration founding the KPD on 1 January 1919 was not sufficient. A mass demonstration by 150,000 in Berlin on 5 January seemed to some, including Karl Liebknecht, to be the signal that an attempt should be made to seize power. The effort was premature and played into the hands of the reactionaries. Although Luxemburg disagreed that this was the time to seize power, she felt that she must support the effort. The SPD government, relying on armed militia (the Freikorps) and republican units, bloodily suppressed the revolutionaries who had seized various buildings, including the Berlin police HQ and the offices of the SPD newspaper. Many of the revolutionaries were shot after surrendering. In the next two months the SPD government, the party in order, crushed the initial revolutionary workers' movement throughout Germany. Communists later claimed that 3,000 workers had been killed and murdered in these two months. The SPD government itself admitted that 1,200 workers had been killed including 29 sailors trying to collect their pay 'because they looked intelligent'. The SPD was absolutely unrepentant. The SPD Minister of Defence Gustav Noske declared on 1 March: 'Any person found bearing arms and fighting against the government's troops is to be shot immediately.' The actions of the SPD in defence of German capitalism fatally undermined any future potential for working class unity.

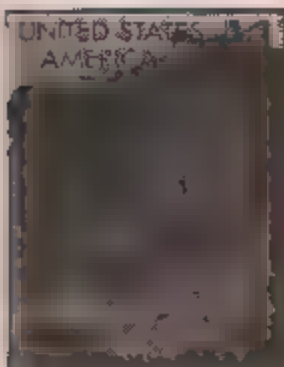
Luxemburg knew that the failure of the German Revolution meant the isolation of the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution survived despite what Luxemburg described on 24 November 1917 as 'social democracy in the West [which] consists of yellow bellies who calmly watch as the Russians bleed to death' (Letter to Louise Kautsky, in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Bronner). She understood that the lack of revolutionary success in the West made terror necessary against the counter-revolutionaries 'who receive support and encouragement for their views from abroad. In short the terror in Russia is above all an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat.' (Letter to Adolf Warski in *The Letters*.)

80 years after Luxemburg's murder humanity still faces the choice of 'socialism or barbarism' and as she wrote a month before her death in *What does the Spartakusbund want?*

'The socialisation of society can be realised only by the stubborn and unending struggle of the working class on all fronts. The liberation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.'

Anthony Bridgman

The First Imperialist World War began in late summer 1914 and ended on 11 November 1918. An estimated 10 million combatants were killed during the war, the overwhelming majority workers and peasants. On top of these losses 1.5 million Armenians were massacred and Serbia lost 20% of its population through famine.



United States of America - rights for all
Amnesty International Publications 1998

Human rights abuses exposed

'The USA has the most powerful economy in the world. Yet it is beset by social problems including unemployment, disease and violent crime. There are extreme disparities of wealth and power; an estimated nine per cent of the nation's children live in extreme poverty and many within US society are destitute. Millions of Americans do not have access to quality educational opportunities or comprehensive health care; some 35 million Americans lack medical insurance. Drug and alcohol addiction are rife.'

This is the background to Amnesty International's recent report into human rights abuses in the United States of America. NICKI JAMESON examines the findings.



Despite legislation and affirmative action, racial division is still deeply entrenched. Black people are three times less likely to be employed than whites with similar qualifications and in practice schools are still segregated, as black and Latino people live predominantly in inner-city ghetto areas with whites dominating the suburbs. The leading cause of death among young black people is homicide and up to one third of all young black men are in jail awaiting trial, in prison or on parole or probation.

Police brutality

There is a widespread and persistent problem of police brutality...Thousands of individual complaints...are reported each year and local authorities pay out millions of dollars to victims in damages after lawsuits. Police officers have beaten and shot unresisting suspects; they have misused batons, chemical sprays and electroshock weapons; they have injured or killed people by placing them in dangerous restraint holds.

The overwhelming majority of victims of police brutality are black or from other minority ethnic groups, while the majority of police officers are still white. Even in areas with a racially mixed force, racism is still extreme - so extreme that in addition to all the civilians killed or maimed since 1941 in New York alone 23 black undercover police officers have been shot by their colleagues, in mistake for suspects, and many others assaulted.

This graphically illustrates the unwritten police policy towards young black men on the streets 'shoot first and say he was armed afterwards'. In November 1997 a US federal agent shot a 17-year-old high school student who walked past his car. A grand jury cleared him of any wrongdoing when he explained he had mistaken the youth's candy bar for a gun. A month later an unarmed black man was shot dead in a New York supermarket - this time the police said they thought his keys were a gun.

Some US police forces have banned 'hog-tying' restraining prisoners by tying their ankles to their wrists behind their backs, following countless deaths from 'positional asphyxia' - in San Diego alone 94 deaths in custody between 1982 and 1992 were officially attributed to hog-tying or neck-holds and the real number is likely to be far higher. Many other forces still use 'hog-tying', which they also refer to as 'suitcasing'.

Other victims have been killed or injured by so-called 'less-than-lethal' weapons, including chemical sprays, electroshock weapons and batons. At least 3,000 US police forces carry Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray, which causes coughing, gagging and an acute burning sensation on the skin and inside the nose and mouth. It is supposedly used in a short burst to disable a suspect; however OC spray has frequently been used on peaceful demonstrators, such as a free-protester in Oregon who was repeatedly batoned and sprayed on his genitals and legs to the degree where he needed hospital treatment for burns.

And the police officer who wants to play Luke Skywalker can indulge his fantasies with a stun-gun or taser. The stun-gun has two metal prongs which emit an electric-shock, while the taser shoots two barbed hooks attached to wires into the victim's clothing. In both cases a high-voltage 'jolt' of 50,000 volts is then administered.

US prisons - overcrowded and abusive

Between 1980 and 1997 the US prison population trebled to reach 1.7 million. This huge increase has led to massive overcrowding, squalor and violence but also to big bucks for industry, with private corporations now housing more than 77,000 prisoners. As local facilities become full, a growing number of states have begun transporting prisoners to other states, sometimes thousands of miles away. Women prisoners from Hawaii have been transferred to Texas and hundreds of Alaskan prisoners shipped to private prisons in Arizona.

Over 60% of those behind bars are from minority ethnic groups. Half are African-Americans, even though they comprise just over 12% of the US population.

The US is one of only two countries not to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child and when it finally ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 26 years after its adoption by the UN General Assembly, it did so with the proviso that it would not implement certain sections, such as those forbidding the detention of children in adult prisons and the execution of people who commit crimes while minors. In June 1998 there were over 3,500 children in adult prisons and Congress was considering legislation to extend prosecution of children as adults.

The many instances of physical brutality documented by Amnesty include:

- Georgia - scores of handcuffed prisoners beaten by riot squads during a 'shake-down';

- California - seven prisoners shot dead and dozens wounded by armed guards; guards staged 'gladiator' fights between prisoners, placing bets on the outcome;

- New York - concerted planned attacks by officers on prisoners in Rikers Island segregation unit;

- Pennsylvania - black death-row prisoners beaten in SCI Greene supermax (NB - this is the prison where political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal is held)

- Texas - two guards gaoled for beating a prisoner to death released after only a few months; other prisoners kicked, beaten, shot with stun-guns and bitten by dogs.

- Arizona - 600 prisoners handcuffed and left outside for 96 hours in desert heat.

Restraints and stun-belts - cruel and unusual punishment

'The cruel use of restraints, resulting in unnecessary pain, injury or even death, is widespread. Mentally disturbed prisoners have been bound, spread-eagled, on boards for prolonged periods in four-point restraints without proper medical authorisation or supervision. Restraints are deliberately imposed as punishment or used as a routine control measure, rather than as an emergency response.'

Prisoners, including juveniles, are frequently transported in leg-irons, sometimes with handcuffs attached to metal waist-chains or their legs and ankles chained together. In Tennessee in 1997 a van transporting prisoners caught fire; the driver and guard were unable to get any of the six shackled prisoners out alive.

A Utah prisoner was shackled to a steel board for 12 weeks in 1995 and only released following a court order. A prisoner in Hawaii was treated for 20 open sores and ulcers after two weeks in wrist-to-waist shackles and leg-irons. And a Los Angeles prisoner, who was strapped to a bed for eight days, had to have his right leg amputated.

As if such horrors were not

enough, many jails use a 'restraint chair', in which a prisoner can be strapped sitting up for days or weeks. A 1996 lawsuit claimed Louisiana sheriff's deputies had subjected prisoners to 'cruel and unusual punishment, and physical and mental torture' by leaving them strapped in restraint chairs for extended periods in their own urine and excrement wrapping tape round their mouths placing football helmets backwards over their heads, strapping their feet behind them and shackling their hands under their buttocks.

Chemical sprays and electroshock devices, like those used by the police, are also in use in prisons, as well as remote control electroshock stun-belts. When activated, these belts emit a powerful electric current which knocks the prisoner to the ground and may cause them to defecate or urinate.

A safe haven? - asylum-seekers in the USA

In 1996 Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which brought in 'expedited removal provisions' for asylum-seekers who enter the US without valid documentation. As has been frequently pointed out, the only way for many refugees to escape persecution is to obtain false passports or visas.

The Immigration and Naturalization Services hold 15,000 detainees and this is anticipated to rise to 24,000 by 2001. Many are treated worse than the prisoners whose treatment is described above, with the added humiliations that they have not committed or been charged with any crime and are detained indefinitely with no release date. Amnesty quotes a Somali refugee's lawyer: 'It was easier to have access to my client on death row than to an asylum-seeker in a New Orleans jail.'

Death row

It would be impossible to write about human rights violations in the USA without mentioning the death pen-

alty and its racist, politically-motivated application. There are over 3,300 prisoners awaiting execution - the highest death row population in the world.

US executions mimic medieval public hangings, with the families of victims encouraged to spectate hoping death will be painful and prolonged. Virtually no politician, Republican or Democrat, dares oppose capital punishment. Instead they compete for popular acclaim using death-row prisoners as political pawns. Bill Clinton deliberately interrupted his 1992 presidential campaign to return to Arkansas to refuse clemency for Ricky Rector, a black mentally handicapped prisoner, whose comprehension of what was happening was so limited he left the dessert of his last meal, saying he would 'save it for later'.

Those who claim that death is administered painlessly are inevitably wrong. All methods employed, including lethal injection, are painful and prone to horrendous errors. In 1996 Luis Mata was strapped down for 70 minutes with the needle inserted in his arm while the Arizona Supreme Court heard legal arguments. When he lost and the execution began, his head and body jerked into a series of prolonged convulsions.

Just as who goes to prison is racially motivated, so too is who dies. It is also heavily influenced by who a convicted murderer has killed. Black and white people are victims of homicide in roughly equal numbers but 82% of prisoners executed since 1976 killed a white person.

In Philadelphia, where Mumia Abu-Jamal is on death row, the likelihood of receiving a death sentence is four times higher for black people. In 1987 the Assistant District Attorney made a training video for the city's prosecutors, encouraging them to select white juries as 'the blacks from low-income areas are less likely to convict'.

Since 1990 the USA has executed eight juvenile offenders, more than any other country and at least 30 mentally ill people. It has also undoubtedly killed innocent people as since 1973, 75 people have been released from death row, having had their convictions overturned in time.

Exporting terror

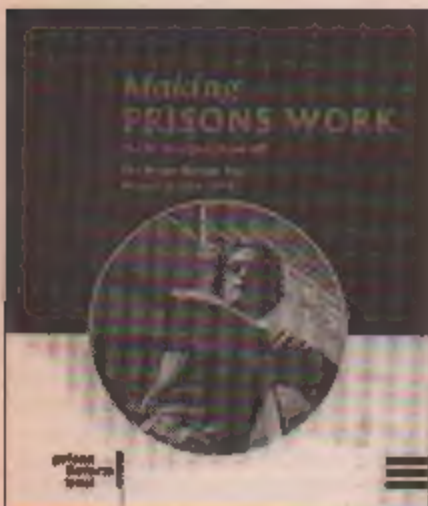
Not content with a virtual civil war against sections of its own population, the US exports death and destruction. Remember, every time you hear a sanctimonious US politician talk about Iraq, 'weapons of mass destruction' that the US is the world's biggest arms exporter. Between 1989 and 1996 it sold \$117 billion of arms, most of it to regimes with appalling human rights records, such as Turkey and Indonesia.

The US also sells 'law enforcement equipment' including thumb-cuffs, thumb-screws, leg-irons, shackles, handcuffs, specially designed implements of torture (yes - it really says that in the catalogue) straitjackets, police helmets and shields, electroshock batons, cattle-prods, shotguns and shells.

What it doesn't sell it gives away - to governments with the right politics, like Bahrain, Colombia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mexico, Peru and Turkey. The \$230 million 'anti-narcotics aid' to South American countries agreed by Congress in 1998 mainly takes the form of lethal weaponry.

This is the country which sets itself up as world arbiter of human rights and justice and which dares to criticise that most democratic and humanitarian of states - Cuba. Terrifyingly, it is also the state whose criminal justice system Britain constantly seeks to imitate.

Prison reform – what reform?



Not content with inviting Jack Straw to give its annual lecture (see FRFI 144) the Prison Reform Trust has now published the Home Secretary's words in a pamphlet, entitled *Making Prisons Work*. It costs an unbelievable £5.95 for 14 pages, one of which is entirely taken up with eulogies to former Tory Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd and PRT Director Stephen Shaw. Finding anything in the other 13 to please even the most wishy-washy of reformers is difficult, and the editor has had to resort to highlighting words and phrases such as 'education', 'safe, fair and responsible', 'outward looking', 'protecting the public'. Presumably, this was supposed to somehow sow the illusion of a common agenda between those who oppose abuse in the prison system and those who perpetrate it – a 'realistic' (also highlighted) consensus for these New Labour times.

So imagine the PRT's surprise when Straw announced that he was implementing three-year minimum sentences for repeat burglars and didn't tell them first. The PRT described the announcement as a 'bombshell... wrong in principle and likely to be disastrous in practice'.

Straw has now announced the introduction of new measures aimed at curbing drug use in prison. From April, prisoners' visitors who are caught bringing in drugs will be banned from the prison for three months and the prisoner will be forced to receive all other visitors on closed visits with a glass screen between them.

Some of this is not new but has just been hyped up to make it sound tougher. Prisoners even vaguely suspected of having drugs brought in to them on visits are already likely to be put on closed visits for three months or longer. In hundreds of incidents the case is never proved and suspicion is enough. However, despite some arbitrary bannings, the burden of proof needed to punish visitors

has until now been higher. If drugs are actually found, the police are usually called and the visitor prosecuted. Now, presumably, they too will be able to be banned on mere suspicion.

Straw's drug strategy announcement was widely leaked, giving the penal reform lobby plenty of time to voice their disgust. However, the anger of the Penal Affairs Consortium was mainly directed at supporting the prison governors, who like the judges forced to hand down minimum sentences, are upset that their powers of 'discretion' are being interfered with.

The Labour government is now into its stride and confident about introducing its own attacks on prisoners, alongside those it inherited from the Tories. Nobody expects prison reformers to be revolutionaries but is it too much to ask them to dedicate their time and resources to publishing literature which advocates reform, as opposed to producing propaganda which the Home Office is quite capable of disseminating for itself?

Frankland prisoners assaulted

On Monday 23 November 1998 prison officers carried out a lockdown search of two wings of Frankland prison. All prisoners on these wings were ordered to undergo a strip-search, and were then ordered, while naked, to squat. Those who refused to be humiliated in this way were taken to the Segregation unit where they were assaulted and searched by force. At least four prisoners have lodged complaints and are considering legal action.

A statement of protest written by Satpal Ram and signed by 43 prisoners from G wing was sent out of the prison and distributed to lawyers and the press. As a result of blowing the whistle, Satpal was also taken to the block, the accusation against him being that he had 'carried out a concerted campaign to undermine authority on the wing'.

The Prison Service's Security Manual lays down guidelines on the use of various forms of searching. It specifies that prison officers have no authority to carry out 'intimate searches' but that they may ask prisoners to squat if they suspect they have hidden items in their genital or anal areas. It beggars belief that the authorities at Frankland suspected

the entire population of two wings of having done so, but when challenged on this point, the Prison Service told a *Big Issue* reporter that 'the prison had cause to suspect all these people of concealing drugs'.

This incident appears to be part of a new 'get tough' policy at Frankland, which in the recent period had taken over from Long Lartin as Britain's (relatively) least oppressive long-term prison. The segregation unit is currently full and prisoners there report being routinely denied exercise and having their mail, including legal mail, interfered with.

Satpal Ram is now in HMP Belmarsh. He was moved there on 7 January, so that he could give evidence in a court case, in which prisoner Parnell Dewberry was charged with assaulting a screw at Whitmoor. Satpal and most of the other 'expert witnesses' were not called but Parnell was acquitted anyway. This is the second victory at Woolwich Crown Court in the past few months. In December Warren Edwards, Gary Staggs and Lee Mitty were found not guilty of escaping from a prison van on the way to HMP Haze-Factory – Wormwood Scrubs.

Dessie Cunningham

FRFI has received lots of letters from prisoners in England and Ireland, expressing their shock and grief at the death of Dessie Cunningham. Dessie took his own life on New Year's Eve in Whitmoor prison. He was 39 years old and was nearing the end of his 17-year sentence.

Following the 1997 'mutiny' at Full Sutton prison, in which Dessie took no part, as he was in the segregation unit when the protest began, he was shipped out to Durham prison. He spent most of the next year in Frankland, including a spell in the block as punishment for refusing to use industrial cleaning fluids without proper

protective clothing, and was moved to Whitmoor in June 1998.

Dessie's funeral was attended by hundreds of people from the south London community where he grew up and by scores of ex-prisoners who came to pay their respects. His partner Debbie has asked FRFI to thank everyone in prison who sent cards or flowers or who wrote or telephoned their condolences.



Taking on the system – advice from inside

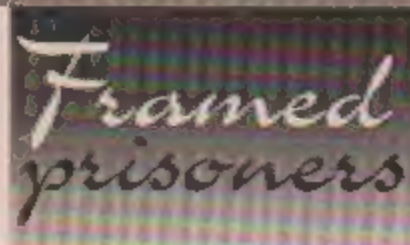
In the April/May 1996 issue of FRFI Domenyk Noonan described how he was planning to relaunch the Prisoners League Association (PLA), a group of prisoners who stood up for their rights in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the prison population has risen by some 30,000 since that period and conditions are worse than ever, differential regimes, New Generation architecture and a range of other measures have rendered organising in prison even more difficult than it already was. PLA members have, therefore, concentrated mainly on informing themselves and others about their legal rights (or lack of them) within the prison system. This has assisted in achieving victory in a number of outside court cases and in countless internal prison adjudications. DOMENYK NOONAN writes: During my time in prison, I have studied as many prison rules as possible and, for these efforts, have been held on the Continuous Assessment Scheme for the past three years. Basically, they do not like me informing you about your rights. I am currently working on a do-it-yourself guide to prison adjudications and

hopefully, after that, a more detailed handbook, which will explain the procedures for strip-searching, strip cells, visits etc. Prior to all that, here are some brief guidelines for those on adjudication.

On every charge you are entitled to ask for an adjournment to seek legal advice (make sure you say advice, not assistance, as they always refuse assistance). Request the F254 – this is the evidence which will be read out against you. Ask for a list of witnesses who were in the relevant area, including screws.

After your hearing is over, request the F256 – this is the record of the hearing, written down by the adjudicating governor and they have to give you a copy free of charge. I have plenty of time on my hands so if you need help, send your F256 to me and I will advise you on whether you have a case for appeal and will refer you to a solicitor in your area who will be able to look at judicial review of the decision against you, if the Prison Service Head Office refuses to quash it.

Write to: Domenyk Noonan, RF1373, HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD.



Poole and Mills – DI Gladding loses libel case

On 27 October 1998 Detective Inspector Gladding of Gloucester police lost a libel action against Channel 4, in connection with their broadcasting of a *Trial and Error* programme about the 1989 frame-up of Gary Mills and Tony Poole. The case cost the Police Federation £1.2 million in legal bills and Gladding took 'early retirement' in disgrace. However, although both the Court of Appeal and the High Court have now heard irrefutable evidence about his perjury and attempts to pervert the course of justice, he faces no criminal charges.

The programme revealed how Neville Juka, a crucial witness in Poole and Mills' murder trial, was not called because Gladding threatened him with arrest and scared him away from attending the committal hearing.

The libel trial heard from the prosecution barrister, who appeared at Poole and Mills' committal, to the effect that had he been aware of Gladding's threats to Juka, he would have immediately brought the committal to a halt. Neville Juka finally got to give his evidence at Poole and Mills' appeal hearing in 1996. He was extremely convincing and detailed but faced a bench

of extremely hostile judges. He has never been given the opportunity to go in front of a jury and explain what really happened on the night that Hensley Wiltshire died.

Tony Poole and Gary Mills are now in the tenth year of life sentences for a murder they did not commit and for which they did not receive a fair trial. Gary Mills (WM0469) is in HMP Ekeston, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 5TU. Tony Poole (WM1030) is in HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs WR11 5TZ.

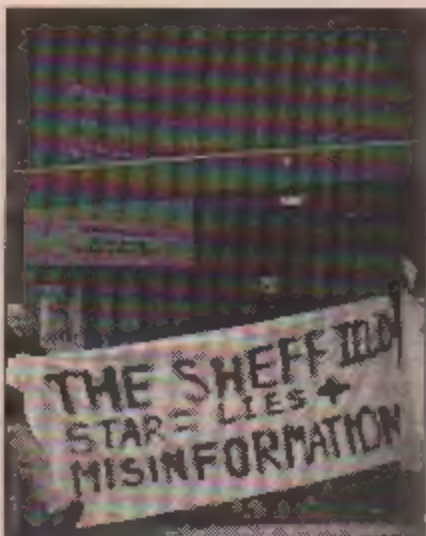
Warren Slaney

Campaigners for Warren Slaney have told FRFI that Warren is being brutalised in the block at Wakefield. He is currently on a '56-day lay-down' from the Woodhill Closed Supervision Unit and is being constantly beaten and victimised. Warren was put on report for assaulting a screw in retaliation and ripped up the charge sheet he was given, resulting in further beatings. His supporters plan to organise a demonstration at the prison. For details contact the Warren Slaney Defence Campaign at PO Box 3241, Salfrey B8 3DB or bhamabc@yahoo.com. Or write to Warren Slaney (JB2574) at HMP Wakefield, 5 Love Lane, Wakefield, Yorks, WF2 5AG.

Mark Barnsley

Supporters of Mark Barnsley held solidarity demonstrations in Sheffield, London, Dublin and Belfast on 21 December. The Sheffield protest was held outside the office of the *Sheffield Star* newspaper which has mounted a concerted campaign of disinformation about Mark's case. The Justice for Mark Barnsley group in Leeds

can be contacted c/o the Cardigan Centre, 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ and info about the campaign is available at snide@globalnet.co.uk. Mark is in HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York YO4 1PS. His prison number is WA2897.



The Cardiff Newsagent Three

In a surprise development just before Christmas the three men convicted of killing a Cardiff newsagent in 1989 were freed on bail pending a fresh appeal hearing. The case against Michael O'Brien, Ellis Sherwood and Darren Hall was referred back to the Court of Appeal by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Michael O'Brien told FRFI 'I have not forgotten all the other framed prisoners still inside and will continue to fight for them once our names are finally cleared.'



Invisible women: what's wrong with women's prisons? Angela Devlin, Waterside Press 1998

The invisible women of the title are here on every page; their stories about what is wrong with women's prisons speak for themselves. Angela Devlin spent five years interviewing women – prisoners and staff – at 12 of the 16 prisons which take women. The female prison population is growing rapidly. Today there are 3,064 women in gaol, a doubling of the number over the last five years. Yet they remain invisible, Devlin argues, because women still represent only a small proportion of the overall prison population (5%) and are subsumed into a world that is organised around a male prisoners and is insensitive to women's very different needs.

Each chapter covers a different aspect of life for women inmates from before they enter prison through to the moment of release and the possibilities of returning to life outside. Hard facts and figures illustrate every point, alongside the often harrowing experiences of the women themselves. We are presented with a horrific picture of overcrowding, understaffing, callous and brutal prison officers, racism, violence and

Women in prison Invisible women

drug use. The overwhelming effect on the women is one of loss of identity, confusion, pain, shame, fear, loneliness and humiliation.

Many of the women – over 50% – have dependent children at home. Bernadette, serving six months for DSS fraud, has four children aged nine, eight, five and two. Her experience reflects that of many of the women when she says:

'It never occurred to me I'd go to prison. I'd left my two-year-old with my friend to come to court and the others were all at school. When I was sentenced I had no chance to make any arrangements for them. The fucking judge – God forgive me – he knew I had little kids, but I was shipped straight to Holloway... I never even kissed them goodbye... My sister had to manage the four of them and she's got five kids of her own.'

These women rely predominantly on family and female friends to look after their children. Many risk losing their homes while they are in prison, and having their children taken into care, a triple punishment often for a first-time offence [40% of women prisoners are first-time offenders]. One probation officer reflected 'Women are destroyed when the children go into care: so often it recalls memories of their own childhood in care, where so many of them were abused.' One third of women prisoners were in local authority care as children.

There are mother and baby units at only four prisons, with places for 68 babies up to the age of 18 months. But



access to these is strictly controlled on the basis of the 'good behaviour' of the mother and there are not enough places to go round. Some pregnant women are forced to hand their newborn babies over to Social Services moments after birth. Most women on remand are separated from their babies, even though 75% of women remanded into custody are not given a custodial sentence. The book reports that young pregnant women have been heavily pressurised into having terminations within days of coming into prison, having been told that they cannot be accepted into an open prison if pregnant. They are offered no counselling.

Women's health is ignored in gaol, with evidence of malnutrition, poor dental care and physical and sexual abuse; often prescribed and essential

medication is removed on entry into prison and takes days or weeks to be resumed. The medical system is part of the punitive regime; the prisoners have no right to confidentiality and the doctors collude with the prison authorities. One woman prisoner was shackled to prison officers while being treated for breast cancer. Devlin tells of another woman whose prescribed hormone replacement therapy was changed at whim by a prison doctor to a higher oestrogen product. She collapsed and was rushed to hospital with three blood clots. She spent the next 48 hours shackled to a prison officer or to the bed. Many over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and supplements can no longer be provided by visitors because of increased security over drugs. There is a shortage of female prison doctors and women in one

prison spoke of being 'touched up' at one male doctor's 'special clinic' for smear tests and so on.

Many of these women have already suffered sexual abuse in the past. Strip-searches – demeaning and upsetting at any time – are particularly traumatic for them. One woman, a rape victim, said it felt like another rape.

Psychiatric care offers little support to often emotionally damaged women, many of whom self-mutilate or who are severely depressed and suicidal. Counselling is virtually non-existent with all prisons automatically resorting to the 'liquid cosh' – Largactil and other tranquillizers, including highly addictive Valium.

Where schemes are set up or already exist that provide practical help or emotional support to women, they are sure to be the first to be cut. The Samaritans' Listeners and Befrienders project has faced severe constraints. When Richard Tilt proposed a 13.5% reduction in unit costs over three years from April 1998, probation officers and psychology services were among the first to go. Prison education has suffered further cuts. A scheme to bus children to see their mothers in prison had its funding cut. However, women are also organising their own projects: in 1994 a minibus scheme was set up in Hackney, run by volunteers, which enables children to see their mothers on a regular basis.

Amongst the issues Angela Devlin lists as the most urgent are: an end to strip-searching and shackling and the use of male officers in women's gaols; an improvement in education and training for women in prison; and an end to the inappropriate use of psychotropic medication. Most of all, women must not be 'tacked on as an afterthought', they must not be the prisoners in the shadows, the invisible women.

Hannah Callier

'We are the working class'

Work: an anthology edited by Dinah Livingston, Katabasis 1998, £12.95

'We are the living symbol of privatisation. We are Asian women. We are low paid. We are the working class. People talk about exploitation in the Third World – it's happening here.' Hillingdon striker.

Work is an anthology of accounts, essays, poetry and reports. Many of the accounts simply relay the mundane daily experience of work, familiar to many of us, which when read in succession, paint a grim picture of the widespread conditions suffered by workers in a capitalist world. These include such depressing facts as a dog groomer earning £90 for a 45-hour week, whose job includes the humiliating task of selling hand-knitted dog coats to wealthy pet owners. Other accounts, such as that of the Hillingdon striker, (quoted above) are written with a concise anger and defiance when describing such events as the TUC's commemoration of the Tolpuddle martyrs where strikers were denied the right to speak.

The reports include chilling facts, highlighting the dangers under which many are forced to work due to profits taking priority over people. We read the account of the horrific death of casual worker, Simon Jones, killed within an hour of his employment, due to a lack of sufficient training by his cost-cutting employers and, in Nick Hopkin's report, of up to five million employees forced to endure bullying in the workplace at the

hands of power-hungry bosses. The accounts in the book represent nearly all sections of the workforce, including the views of a job centre clerk who states that 'clients' are 'quite rude, quite abrasive'. However, there is no account from a so-called 'client', someone who is looking for work.

The book includes over 20 poems which reflect upon the complex relationship we have with work of various kinds, whether paid or unpaid. The essays endeavour to give some analysis of the nature and conditions of work within a global economy. We are provided with further evidence of the widening gulf between oppressed and oppressor nations, on the one hand, and working and ruling classes on the other.

The subjects include the changing face of work in the light of the technological advances witnessed towards the end of this century, and how this has served to widen class divisions and increase pressure on workers who are even more remote from their product or purpose and therefore further alienated as a result of being reduced to mere commodities.

Whilst some of the contributions advocate revolutionary changes to the system, the book as a whole does not attempt to prescribe any defined political solution. Where it does succeed is in giving a voice to the silenced majority. A majority denied the right to a voice in the absence of any political party to represent its interests.

Katy Prince

The Cardiff 3 – fitted up

Fitted In – the Cardiff 3 and the Lynette White Inquiry, Satish Sekar, published by the The Fitted In Project, 1997

On 14 February 1988, Lynette White, a 20-year-old prostitute was brutally murdered in Butetown, Cardiff. Her killer has never been found. Five innocent black men were put on trial and three of them – Stephen Miller, Yusef Abdullahi and Tony Paris – convicted.

With none of the sensationalism of TV/media coverage, Satish Sekar's book begins by describing the lives of the working class people of Butetown, or Tiger Bay as it is known. It's the docklands of Cardiff, one of the oldest established black communities in Britain and also very racially mixed. People living here face poverty and high unemployment, following the collapse of the shipping industry, and endure constant police harassment.

Witnesses to the murder of Lynette White had seen a white male, distressed and covered in blood outside the murder flat and a photofit was broadcast. The police quickly had a prime suspect but when his DNA tests came back negative he was eliminated from the inquiry. Other suspects were similarly eliminated.

Five black men were arrested but there was no forensic evidence against any of them and they had complete alibis for the night of the murder. In their case however, negative DNA results were not considered sufficient to eliminate them.

Massive pressure was put on peo-

ple the police saw as useful witnesses. This produced absurd statements full of lies and inconsistencies which should have stopped the case ever going to court.

The court case itself was dominated by Steve Miller's 'confession', but the police who obtained it knew he had learning difficulties.

Steve Miller was interviewed 19 times over four days, bullied and tormented using 'nice' and 'nasty' tactics. Gareth Peirce, Miller's solicitor at the appeal, writes in her foreword to the book that his detention and interrogation 'smack of the rack and the thumbscrew'. She also points out how 'spectacularly easy' it is for police to frame innocent people and that it is happening daily in British police stations.

So, like Yusef Abdullahi and Tony Paris, who were repeatedly interrogated and repeatedly denied any involvement in the murder, there must be scores of people struggling to resist. This is a tiny extract from one of the 20 interviews Abdullahi was subjected to. Every attempt to crack him failed and the police grew increasingly angry.

DI Mouncher: You are a vicious, evil, wicked man.

Abdullahi: So you're telling me.

Mouncher: I am telling you.

Abdullahi: Well I don't think I am.

Mouncher: Well I think you are.

Abdullahi: I am an innocent man who you persecuted.

Mouncher: I think you are...

Abdullahi: An innocent man.

Mouncher: You're a disgrace to the human race!

Wrong! It is the racist police who are the disgrace to humanity, the racist courts and judges. And sitting on top of the cesspit that is the criminal justice system, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, welcomed the increased oppression introduced by Howard and seeks to destroy democratic rights still further.

Fitted In is a meticulously compiled account of the framing of the Cardiff Three. The book is in three parts: the first two dealing with the fit-up itself and the criminal trials. The third section is about what happened afterwards, but surprisingly, once they are freed on appeal, we hear nothing more about the actual Cardiff Three. Instead we move to Satish Sekar's own investigations into the case and his attempt to force the South Wales police to re-open the murder inquiry. With this aim in mind Sekar begins using phrases such as 'in fairness to the police'. But the whole of his work, everything he has unearthed and recounted proves how they do not deserve such 'fairness'. Three black men want to prison for a murder they did not commit following a blatantly racist frame-up; two others were only acquitted at the end of the longest murder trial in British legal history; the killer of Lynette White is still free – and no one in South Wales police force has ever been punished.

Alexa Byrne

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TALKING POLITICS WITH FRFI Readers and supporters group

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Makes you sick:
poverty and health
Monday 15 February 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London
WC1 (Holborn tube)

Monday 15 March, 7.30pm
Phone 0171 837 1688 for details

NORTHWEST
Monday 22 February, 7.30pm
Monday 22 March, 7.30pm
Both at the Beer House, Angel St/
Rochdale Road, Manchester
Thursday 4 March, 7pm
Harrington Building, University
of Central Lancashire, Preston

For further details, contact FRFI, BCM
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**REINSTATE NIGEL COOK
CAMPAIGN MEETINGS**
Tuesday 2 March and Tuesday 23
March, both at 7.30pm, Bangor St
Community Centre, Brookhouse,
Blackburn

LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

From Havana to Mexico City

After going on the Rock around the Blockade brigade to Cuba in December, I travelled to Mexico where the Church and Coca-Cola are the two most pervasive forces in this enormous country. The more isolated the region, the more likely there are to be houses painted with the Coca-Cola symbol announcing the existence of a shop inside where the most famous soft drink in the world is available.

As I stepped off the bus in the most inaccessible villages in Chiapas, Pepsi adverts jostled with the almighty red and white Coca-Cola motif plastered onto the walls of houses clinging to the mountainside above. Children as young as three or four were desperately trying to sell chewing-gum, cigarettes, oranges or peanuts. So meagre is their supply of merchandise that I don't see how they could make more than the equivalent of 50p in an entire day.

The Mexico Times reports that at least five million children are working in Mexico and about half of them have dropped out of school. 70% of these child labourers work

between five and 14 hours a day. This is nearly a quarter of Mexico's population aged between five and 14. I remember the happy children we visited in Cuban schools and at the *circolo infantil*.

The Pope hits Mexico City just as I do. The more brutal and degrading the struggle for survival, the more recruits for the Church. People living in miserable conditions dream of a better life to come. Many people have shrines occupying the main rooms of their houses. Religious icons are on street corners, by the sides of motorways, in cafes, cinemas, photocopying shops, taxis and in remote parts of the jungle. Operation IV Papal Visit '99 will involve 1,500 delegation workers, 300 security forces, 426 emergency rescue officers, 100 Attorney-General office staff members, 53 doctors and 1,000 boy scouts. The reported \$2 million cost of Pope John Paul's visit is proof how far Catholic leaders are removed from the struggles of the country's poor. The cost includes transportation, food and housing for the Pope and his

delegation. A leading Mexican bank, Banamex, will cover the costs which the Church plans to pay back through the sales of medallions commemorating the pontiff's visit.

On 22 January I fight my way through crowds waving plastic flags, commemorative Juan Pablo II posters, holding silver plates and official medallions. Neither the Vatican nor the Mexican Roman Catholic Church have paid for this visit. The merchandise is as expertly marketed as Coca-Cola, and once again it is the poor who pay.

I am suffering from what in Mexico is called *Monterozas's revenge*. While on the brigade I suffered from a stomach bug and was taken twice to the local hospital in the small town of Fomento. On both occasions I was seen immediately by the doctor who prescribed a drug for which I paid two Cuban pesos (about 8p). Towards the end of my time in Mexico the same symptoms presented themselves again, so I attended the emergency department of a hospital recommended by the British Embassy in Mexico City. They wanted 675 pesos (£45) for the doctor to see me. When I replied that I did not have the money, they said 'Haven't you got a

credit card?' When I told them I did not, two very sympathetic doctors who spoke some English came out and had a brief chat with me. I was prescribed an antibiotic for which the pharmacy demanded 365 pesos (£22) for eight tablets. I wonder how much medical cover these children who sell chewing-gum in the street have? In North America and Europe the percentage of the population aged over 60 is about a fifth of the population. In Cuba it is 12.9%. In Mexico it is 6.1%. I think of the armed robbers who held up our bus at 3am on an isolated road between Chiapas and Mexico City. They fired a few shots into the front of the bus and forced us off the road, but the bus got stuck and was unable to go down a rough dirt track where the bandits would have stripped us to find all our money. The robbers shouted and cursed the driver as the engine roared and the gears crashed, but we were solidly stuck. They boarded the bus, snatched as much money as they could and disappeared into the night. They got 200 pesos from me - enough for about five tablets of antibiotics.

RICHARD ROQUES
North London

Seeing Cuba with our own eyes

I have just come back from a brigade to Cuba - my first, but hopefully not my last.

The amount of inspiration I have come back with confirms my belief in the need for a more humane society in Britain. I had heard several stories about Cuba from friends who have been on holiday there, but through the nature of the brigade, I think I have seen a lot more of the real Cuba in two weeks than most people see if they are just on holiday there for two weeks. I have seen with my own eyes the exceptional medical service and the well-designed, effective and fair education system that benefits individuals and the country as a whole. These are just two examples of the full, free welfare system that is available to all Cubans, not on the basis of wealth, colour or creed. The results of such a system were hard to miss. In Cuba, everyone is encouraged

to attain their full potential, and what little they have they share. These things were certainly an eye-opener to me, coming from Britain. I displayed what can be possible co-operation and consideration for the well-being of all. Cuba is not just a mirage in the desert of capitalism, it is a reality. It's about having a love for humanity, rather than just a love for money.

RUTH APPELBY
Bristol

What I encountered in Cuba was amazing and the memories will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Everywhere we saw signs of the blockade. Old, run-down vehicles, empty pharmacies and food rationing. Yet we also saw everywhere the amazing response of

the Cuban people and their determination to defend themselves against imperialism - this was inspirational. One such example is the advent of 'green medicine'. We visited a centre where state-employed specialists practise acupuncture and holistic, herbal medicine. In the face of shortages of basic medicines such as paracetamol, the Cuban government prioritises access for all to preventative, holistic medicines. At a time when countries such as Britain are just beginning to recognise such practices as viable alternatives to conventional western medicine, Cuba is leading the way.

Having seen what Cuba can achieve in the face of such economic aggression, I have returned to Britain feeling that the Revolution continues to be strong. However, we must show solidarity with Cuba in campaigning to lift the blockade to ensure Cuba remains strong.

KATHERINE PERKS
Canterbury

Racist USA

In north America's famous city Washington DC, there is a building, but this is no ordinary building, this is where Clinton and co decide what action to take next. But behind it hundreds of people, black people to be exact, are on the streets, a lot of them ill, for in the US you have to pay to go to hospital. It's fine for rich people and OK for ordinary people, but it's terrible for poor people. Oh, I wait for the day when America becomes a communist country!

REBECCA RENSTEN (aged 8)
North London

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE

LONDON
Eyewitness Report from Cuba
Thursday 11 February, 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London
WC1 (Holborn tube) £7/50p

Campaign meetings are held fortnightly on Mondays at Conway Hall at 8pm. Next meetings: 8 February, 22 February, 8 March, 22 March. All welcome

NORTHWEST
Eyewitness Report from Cuba
Wednesday 17 February, 7pm, Salam
Chambers, SU building, Metropolitan
University of Manchester, Oxford Rd

Boycott Bacardi Meeting
Tuesday 9 February, 7pm
Room 136, Harrington Building,
University of Central Lancashire,
Fylde Rd, Preston

MIDLANDS
Cuba - 40 Years of Revolution
Eyewitness Report from Cuba
Monday 22 February
12.45 William Farr School, Welton, Lincs
7.30pm Lincoln Labour Club, Grafton
House, Newland, Lincoln
Tuesday 23 February 7.30pm
The Old Volunteer, Silver Street,
Doncaster

EVENTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MARCH
Saturday 6 February
Assemble Bldn, south London
(opposite Lambeth Town Hall) 12 noon
for march to New Scotland Yard and
Downing Street

**MARCH AGAINST
RACIST IMMIGRATION LAWS**
Saturday 27 February
Assemble 12 noon, Embankment,
London. March called by National
Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CRITICAL LAWYERS**
Weekend of 6/7 March
Manchester Metropolitan University
'Human Rights, Human Wrongs'
Contact Ian Grigg-Spall, Kent Lew
School, University of Kent, CT2 7NS
(tel: 01227 823425 or 01227 766233)
for details. Student fee £5.

Client adviser - police informer

Whilst I was at my local Employment Service Jobcentre to sort out an enquiry on 18 January, I was kept waiting due to the 'client adviser' being busy. He was making a telephone call to a sergeant at Wandsworth CID. It turned out the police wanted information on someone and, after the police gave the national insurance number of the person concerned, the client adviser got the person's details up on his computer screen. Without hesitation or consulting his manager, the dole worker dutifully supplied the information he had on his 'client'. The person he was grassing on had no fixed address, so the police were informed when he/she last signed on and when they were due to sign on again. The dole worker then went to get the person's case file to check for previous addresses. His eagerness to please knew no bounds.

In the fight against the Jobseeker's Allowance, we were continuously being told by the petty bourgeois left that what was needed was unity between the unemployed and the dole workers. This led in some cases to the only action sanctioned being that the unemployed were to be called upon to support dole workers' strikes for better pay and protection. The result being that the dole workers now implement the JSA and New Deal, as well as providing the police with information. I, along with other unemployed people, clearly see that the dole workers are part of the state's machinery to police the unemployed, and it is they who should demonstrate some solidarity with us before any rhetoric about unity is accepted.

DAVID METFIELD
Tooting, south London

Fight student fees

On 22 January in Oxford, about 2,000 people marched in support of five undergraduates who face suspension for their principled refusal to pay tuition fees. The crowd assembled bearing banners of universities from across Britain, and others as diverse as trade unions, 'Faggots fighting fees', Hillingdon workers and the SWSS-sponsored 'F*** FEES' placard, which caused a few distinguished eyebrows to be raised. We marched, shouting at the top of our lungs, across Magdalen bridge, down Cornmarket (Oxford's main shopping street) to the University Admin building, where

our attempt to occupy was met by a line of police. Further attempts to get in brewed up anger on both sides and the police were getting a bit violent (surprise) so everyone moved off to rally by Martyrs Memorial. The mood changed to angry optimism, cheering the speakers as they tore into the champagne socialism of Tony Blair amid the dreaming spires which he had visited for free on his path to power. It's not just about tuition fees, it's about human rights, the right to education and freedom from a government which sees our country as one massive market.

KATY BEIMART
Oxford

Woodhill in court

The struggle of prisoners in the notorious Woodhill control unit to challenge their inhumane treatment finally went to court in January, forcing the Prison Service to once again try and publicly defend the indefensible in terms of the Woodhill regime.

Lawyers for Woodhill prisoners Rifat Mehmet and Sean O'Connor told the High Court that the procedure whereby prisoners were 'selected' for the unit was completely arbitrary and unlawful, and basically consisted of prison staff targeting various prisoners and 'ghosting' them to the unit without any real evidence of wrongdoing or hint of due process. Once in the unit, known as 'Alcatraz', prisoners are subjected to a regime which both the Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Prison Reform Trust have described as 'barren' and 'cruel'.

The court was told about the 'brutalising environment' at Woodhill and how prisoners there were denied all rights and 'privileges' and confined in cells devoid of the most elementary human necessities for 23 hours a day. A psychiatrist called to give evidence on behalf of Rifat Mehmet, said that his continued detention would 'produce psychiatric symptoms in the extreme'. This is the unit senior Prison Service official Phil Wheatley described as 'therapeutic'.

The court reserved its judgment, so we must now wait to see whether the Prison Service will continue to be allowed to operate beyond the law in its treatment of prisoners at Woodhill, or whether basic human rights will take precedence over the prison system's dubious claims that by isolating and breaking prison 'troublemakers', protest in prisons can be eradicated.

JOHN BOWDEN
HM Prison Sutton

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688 Website:
<http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk/>

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

SICK TO DEATH

Poverty causes ill health

That poverty is both a direct and an indirect cause of ill-health is not a new idea. The Black Report of 1980, delivered to a new Tory government, showed the links as well. It was quickly shelved. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the link between poor sanitation and diseases such as cholera and typhoid was uncovered, the fact that poverty led to a shorter life expectancy was well-understood. Read Marx in the first volume of *Capital*, where he presents an abundance of material on this subject as part of his denunciation of capitalism.

Yet the only time that any action has resulted from all this research is when the health or material interests of the rich and privileged have been at stake. The public sanitation programmes that started in the early nineteenth century came into existence because the rich were being killed by cholera and typhoid epidemics which started in the slums of the great cities. The first elements of state welfare were set in place at the turn of the century because only one in three working class volunteers was fit enough to be recruited to the British Army during the Boer War. Apart from that, working class health was of little or no concern to the ruling class. Provided there were sufficient numbers to work, working class health was left to the working class to sort out, in the public and Poor Law hospitals which were usually just a prelude to the grave.

Inequalities and the NHS

Hence, although people live longer now than they did 50 or 100 years ago, the health consequences of inequalities between rich and poor have never been dealt with, not even during the post-war boom. There was an explosion of demand for health-care when the NHS was introduced. For the first time, working class women could have proper gynaecological treatment. Another service which was overwhelmed was dentistry. The management of NHS demand has been a preoccupation of governments ever since. Two methods have been used: charging, whether for prescriptions or for glasses, and the waiting list, which has been used to limit access to surgical services. The rich have never had a problem with this: they could afford to go private, as could the more affluent sections of the middle class. However, for the working class and even its more privileged layers, such an option is not available. But because the electoral support of the more privileged layers of the working class are crucial to both the Tories and Labour, both have tried to ensure that length of waiting lists does not get out of hand. Labour has continued the policies of the last Tory government: keeping a lid on the waiting lists has become a major preoccupation, to the exclusion of problems of far greater health significance.

The end of NHS dentistry

Yet Labour cannot keep on squaring the circle for ever. As the underlying crisis of capitalism tightens its grip, so it has become necessary to chip away at the extent and level of service the NHS provides, especially to the working class. Nowhere is this more graphically demonstrated than in dental services. The state of an adult's teeth are a graphic indicator as to his or her conditions of life in



The publication of the Acheson report into Inequalities in health gives graphic evidence of the link between poverty and ill-health. It shows how 'for many measures of health, inequalities have either remained the same or have widened in recent decades.' ROBERT CLOUGH and HANNAH CALLER report.

childhood. Fifty years ago, a common wedding present to working class women was complete dental extraction, to avoid the problems of decay in later life and the costs associated with treating it. Now NHS dentistry is virtually dead, so that in some parts of the country, a third of all 12-year-olds have untreated, decayed teeth. Levels of decay have doubled since the Tories cut NHS fees to dentists in 1990. Now, for example, only 11 out of 170 dentists in Cornwall are willing to take on NHS patients. The NHS consultation fee is £5.80; a private consultation can be up to £30. An NHS dentist who opened last year in Truro had to hire a bouncer to control the queues. Barely a third of those in the lowest two income groups have been to a dentist in the past year, a significant fall over the last five years. The same divide as in pre-NHS days is re-

appearing: half the population with good mouths, half with rampant, uncontrolled disease. It is now predicted that the only option for the poor will be a return to extraction dentistry. Labour has no plans to restore NHS dentistry even to the level it was in 1990.

Rationing drugs

The restrictions proposed to limit the prescribing of Viagra are another form of rationing. Frank Dobson was cunning in his choice of this drug to create a precedent. Never before have there been such clear restrictions on the NHS-prescription of a licensed drug. It was a clever political manoeuvre to get the principle of governmental rationing accepted. The rather obscene alliance of the sanctimonious British Medical Association protesting the 'clinical freedom' of GPs in alliance with the

drug multinational Pfizer was an easy opponent for Dobson to deal with. Yet there are far more serious issues at stake. There is a new generation of drugs for the treatment of schizophrenia which are far more effective, and have far less dramatic side-effects than Largactil – the 'liquid cosh' – which is still in widespread use. The new drugs are much more expensive, however, and are effectively on ration through cash limits. Viagra of course is available through many private outlets at between £8 and £15 a pill – available, that is, to those who can afford it.

Cutting beds

Rationing is going to be an increasingly important mechanism in controlling NHS expenditure. Government policy to encourage a wholesale privatisation of the NHS through the use of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will add greatly to the cost of running hospital services, whilst imposing savage reductions in capacity. More than 30 hospitals worth more than £2.5bn are being built with private money. But the cost is immense. A new hospital for UCLH in London will have a third fewer beds, 28% fewer nurses and 20% fewer operating facilities than the units it replaces. It will have to increase throughput by 25% – performance levels never yet achieved. This is typical for all PFI projects: a sample of seven showed that on their completion, 5,185 beds would have shrunk to 3,795. Meanwhile, the extra cost of borrowing the £2.5bn will be some £50m per annum. So the NHS will pay more to get less, but it cannot default on any payments.

However, the government also faces problems with recruitment of all sorts of staff – doctors, nurses, occupational therapists. There is a national shortage of 13,000 nurses alone, and although the government has promised to recruit 15,000 over the next three years, 2,700 left the profession last year alone and 71% considered quitting. A key reason is pay, although the steady intensification of work is also a factor. 22% of nurses have to hold a second job. The government is rumoured to be prepared to offer an unstaged rise of 11% to lower-grade nurses. However, funding such a settlement will blow its modernisation strategy clean out of the water.

Two means remain for controlling costs: rationing services and either increasing charges for them or introducing new ones. Either way, the poor will be hit most. It is ironic that for all its talk about tackling inequalities, the only people who are charged for using an NHS bed are those on benefits and pensions – the poor, who have their benefits deducted once they have been in hospital a few weeks. And whatever the government says, rationing has to be directed against the poor because they suffer much more ill-health and because they cannot afford any different system of healthcare. So, as British capitalism moves back into recession and unemployment mounts, inequalities in health will continue to widen.

- In the early 1970s, the death rate among men of working age was twice as high amongst unskilled workers as it was amongst professionals. In the 1990s, it was almost three times as high.

- Death rates from coronary heart disease scarcely changed for unskilled workers between 1970/72 and 1991/93. For professionals, they fell by more than half. It is the same story for deaths from lung cancer.

- Death rates from all causes overall fell by 10% for unskilled workers during this period, but by more than 40% for professionals.

- Suicide rates fell for professionals, but rose by 50% for the unskilled.

- Life expectancy continues to widen. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, life expectancy for professionals increased by two years on average; for unskilled workers by 1.4 years. The gap now stand at five years for men, and three years for women. However, overall healthy life expectancy has changed little.

- If death rates for men aged 20-64 in social class IV and V were the same as those for social class I and II, there would be 17,000 fewer deaths per year.

- Between the 1994-96, the infant mortality rate for babies born to parents in social classes I and II was 5 per 1,000 live births. For babies born to families in social classes IV and V it was over 7.

- In 1996, among the 45-64 age group, 17% of professional men report a limiting long-standing illness compared to 48% of unskilled men. For women, the figures are 25% and 45% respectively.

- 12% of professional men smoke compared to 41% of unskilled men. The figures for women are 13% and 36% respectively. Households in the lowest tenth of income spend six times as much of their income on tobacco as households in the higher tenth. Smoking accounts for 46,000 deaths by cancer, and contributes to approximately one third of all deaths from cancer.

- In 1996, 25% of women in social class V were classified as obese, compared with 14% of those in social class I. Obesity is linked with poor diet.



Health Minister Frank Dobson visits hospitals – but will Labour tackle the poverty and inequality which makes poor people sick